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# The Gift Of Bonaparte

*A NOVEL*

BY

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ROBERT SHORTZ

AUTHOR OF

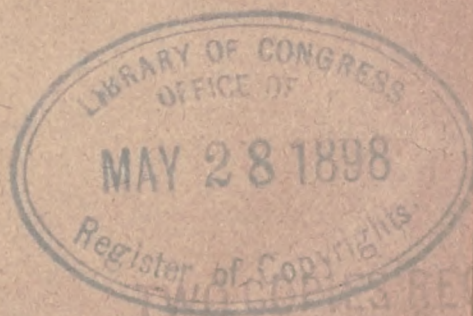
"A PASSING EMPEROR"

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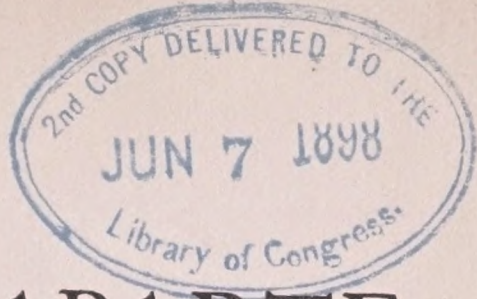








# THE GIFT OF BONAPARTE



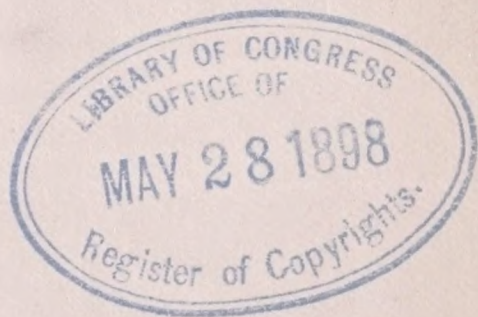
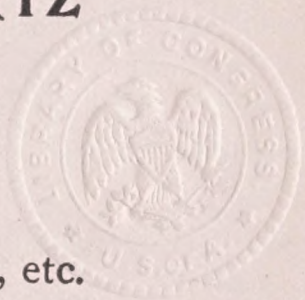
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# THE GIFT OF BONAPARTE.

## BOOK I.

### THE BEAUTY OF PIEDMONT.

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#### CHAPTER I.

“ITALY LIES BEFORE YOU !”

*“Soldiers, you are naked and hungry. I am going to lead you into the most fertile plains that the sun beholds. Rich provinces and opulent towns will be at your mercy, you will find there honor, glory, and wealth. Soldiers of the Army of Italy, with such a prospect before you, can you fail for France ?”*

The harsh, barking voice of old Colonel Billot ceased abruptly.

Seven hundred green-sleeved, gauntleted right arms rose in the air, the rays of the declining sun blazed back from the polished blades of seven hundred frantically brandished sabers, and from seven hundred throats there burst a yell, wild and exultant as the full-tongued cry of a pack of famished wolves in sight of their quarry.

Far and wide along the plain it ran, that thundering, significant shout, as regiment after regiment took up the call and the rocky hills about Albenga echoed and reverberated the answer of the army to the first proclamation of the chief new come to us from Paris.

As the troops marched in from review on the afternoon of that 19th Germinal in the year IV. of the



French Republic, one and indivisible, but to speak in the language of the outside Monarchies and Priesthoods, the 4th of March in the year of Our Lord, 1796, every pair of eyes belonging to the fifty thousand ragged soldiers, arrayed beneath the stained and worn tricolored standards shone with the hope of plunder; every stomach felt itself filled with macaroni Neapolitan and the well-seasoned ollas, the appetizing ragouts of sunny Italy.

For months the army of the Alps had starved and suffered, its officers practically without pay, its men almost without rations, its horses with scarcely feed enough to keep their bones within their skins. For months we had held our positions among the barren and uninviting hills of the southeastern frontier, grimly awaiting the approach of the Austrian who threatened constantly to invade our beloved France.

Our time of inactivity was past, and on the morrow we were to move forward, to sunny Italy, where food and booty would be the reward of valor.

*At last we had a General who showed us prey!*

After stables, when we had finished rubbing down and caring for the rough-coated, ill-fed troop-horses that had borne us patiently throughout the afternoon, I started to walk into the town in company with Private Pierre Santron and Renaud Bronsard, otherwise called Poignet d'Acier, chief *maître d'armes* of our regiment, the *chasseurs-à-cheval* of Damremont.

"Well, my Georges," said the last-named, passing his left arm over my shoulder and keeping step with me as we left the building, "what think you of the bulletin we heard out yonder?"

"Great words, were they not, Renaud?" I answered with enthusiasm. "As I listened I ached to be using my saber on the Austrian white-coats."

"Aye, they gave one that feeling, there is no doubt," Poignet d'Acier agreed with a hard smile. "*Sac-à-papier!* but he knows how to make men thirst for battle, that General Bonaparte!"

"They're a different kind, however, his words, from those they fed out to us before the campaign of Valmy," put in Pierre Santron, who walked on my left. "Then, one heard nothing but 'For the Republic,' and 'Tis sweet and beautiful to die for France,'



and the like. They fulfilled the purpose as well, too. Had it not been for them I'd be at home in Brittany this moment, with a sound coat to my back instead of this well-ventilated green jacket, that has almost as many holes as it has buttons."

"And the regiment would be the poorer for a good comrade," I returned, with a kindly glance at his homely, honest countenance, which, despite its little eyes of bright blue, turned-up nose and bristling red mustache, I knew to belong to a brave and sturdy soldier.

"But tell me, then, Pierre Santron, how it comes that a bulletin is responsible for your presence here?" I continued.

"*Diantre!* but that is simple enough," Santron made reply. "Though most of Brittany rose in revolt against the Republic and took arms for the tyrant Louis Sixteenth, in our commune the people loved their country above their king. So when the news came that the Prussians had entered *la patrie*, our mayor held a meeting at the town-hall and asked for volunteers to go and fight them. Like a fool I went to the assembly out of curiosity. *Dame!* there were girls there, the prettiest in the land, waving the tricolor. And the band played the Marseillaise, and the people sang, and the mayor made an oration. It was too much for me. I was the first to put down my name as a recruit."

"And very properly done, *parbleu!*" remarked Poignet d'Acier.

"Not thus thought my good old father," Pierre Santron grinned back. "He was a man of peaceful disposition, and he ever hated talk of war and battles. When I went home at noon-day he was awaiting me."

"I hope, Pierre," says he, "that the cursed nonsense they are yelling themselves hoarse over in the village has had no attention from thee?"

"Why, not exactly, my father," I told him, "not exactly."

"Because," says he, "Jacques Chopin cried to me as he rode by that 'twas a fine thing the name of Santron should head the list."

"I saw he knew, then, and I grew red and stammered, for like all Bretons I had great regard for my father."



“ ‘Indeed, *mon père*,’ says I, ‘indeed, I had no thought to become a soldier when I went to the *hôtel de ville*, but Monsieur Bonmarché—our mayor—talked of France, and the tears ran from his eyes, and I felt sorry for him, and so—’

“ *Tête bleu!* how furious my father was! ‘*Sacr-r-r-e!*’ he shouted, ‘and thus it was that thou enlisted then, *because Monsieur Bonmarché wept!* Imbecile, pig, dolt, donkey, wooden-head that thou art! Dost not know that as for Monsieur Bonmarché ’tis all that *he* will do, stay safe at home here and cry? while idiots like thyself will be running against the Prussian bullets! Thou wert ever a fool, Pierre, and thy folly would bring thee to grief without a guardian. So to watch over thee, *I’ve enlisted myself.*’ ”

“What!” I cried with a shout of laughter, “your good father went to the wars also, Pierre Santron?”

“He met his death at Fleurus, with his teeth fast locked in the throat of an Austrian cuirassier. We had to bury them together. Canst say as much for *thy* father, *Sans-barbe?*” Santron asked suddenly, with a faint taunt in his voice.

I bit my lip and gazed straight ahead.

“ ’Tis from him, without doubt, that thou got’st those white hands and that air of the *grand seigneur*, ” the Breton proceeded. “A fine legacy for a private of *chasseurs!* He might at least have left thee a name besides, this unknown father of thine, who, for all thou canst tell, may—”

“*Dame!* wilt thou hold that biting tongue, then, Pierre Santron?” impatiently broke in Renaud Bronsard. “Let the boy alone, I tell thee. If he know not who was his father, is not Georges Luc a name good enough for any man in the regiment? And if skill in sword-play be hereditary, as *I* believe it is, he has something for which to thank his ancestors. Take care that thy words do not move him to prove it upon thy clumsy carcass.”

“Ha, ha!” Santron laughed, giving my arm a friendly pinch, “dost hear that, *Sans-barbe?*” The *maître d’armes* is playing the peacemaker and trying to avert a meeting between us. ’Tis the first time I have ever heard Renaud Bronsard talk in such fashion.”

“There is reason for my mood,” promptly responded



Poignet d'Acier. "Had this happened a month ago, Georges would have had every encouragement from me to spit thee, like the great goose that thou art. But now, with the campaign opening, he might as well save his steel for the Piedmontese and the Kaisers. Moreover, the new commander-in-chief casts no favorable eye upon dueling. I hear that orders against the practise will be read to-night at parade, and that those who disobey are promised the fusillade. And hark ye, the little Corsican means what he says."

"I have never seen him, Renaud," I said curiously. "What fashion of man is he, then?"

"Thou'lt never forget him once thou hast gazed upon his face," he answered. "As to his appearance, he's not much to look at. But face and form go for nothing in a soldier. 'Tis deeds that should speak for him. Bonaparte took Toulon, they say, and though Barras had command of the troops of the Convention on the 13th Vendémiaire, 'twas really the artilleryman who crushed the sections. As a reward, the Director got him placed over the Army of the Alps, instead of Scherer."

"They say in the army that his marrying Madame de Beauharnais had as much to do with it," Pierre Santron observed with an air of affected simplicity.

"And how?" I demanded, for I generally paid little heed to the gossip that occurred among my comrades.

"Oh, she is a *great friend* to Barras, and he naturally wished to do something for the man she chose as a husband. When thou art a member of the Directorate, Sans-barbe, wilt give *me* an army if I marry Mademoiselle Cosette, the daughter of Baker Jarbeau?"

I colored, while Santron screamed with laughter at my blushing cheeks.

"Silence gives consent, so I may yet hope to command an army of France," he cried. "Remember, it is a promise, and I know thou'lt keep it, for thou hast that habit in common with other traits of the old *noblesse*."

"*Sapristi!* but you disgust me, Pierre Santron," I said angrily, "you are forever calling me an aristocrat, when you know I am as loyal a son of the Republic as any in the regiment. As to making good one's



promises, should not the word of a *sans-culotte* be as scrupulously fulfilled as that of a king?"

As I spoke the last word I spat upon the earth.

Santron nodded his head so vigorously that the two long plaits of hair that fell over his cheeks from either temple waved in the air, despite the bits of lead attached to them to keep them in place.

The *maître d'armes* regarded me with a smile that grew gradually sad. Then as if to turn the subject he remarked: "Peste, boy! you'll have something else to think of to-morrow than bragging that your ancestors never wore breeches when we meet the Austrians!"

"Bah!" I answered, smiling with the defiant confidence of youth, "though they were twenty to one against us, are we not Frenchmen? You both know that we have but to cross the mountains and Italy is ours. "Think of Italy and the wealth we will gather there."

"Again *Monsieur le grand seigneur* shows himself," said Santron, stopping and making a low bow. "They always took all they could lay hands on. I pity the citizens Italian who come under thy grip, Sans-barbe. In accordance with my degree *I* shall seek something to eat instead of riches. But now *bonjour*, citizens, my way lies toward the camp. Tell Mademoiselle Cosette she will some day wed Pierre Santron, Sans-barbe, as needs must be since Italy lies before you!"

"Yes, Italy lies before us!" muttered both Bronsard and I.

AND THE GLEAM IN OUR EYES TOLD THE MERCY ITALY WOULD RECEIVE.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE WOMAN OF THE PLACE DE LA REVOLUTION.

THE *maître d'armes* and I stood for a few moments, watching the clumsy figure of Santron as he made his way across the plain toward the camp. With his broad, stooping shoulders and bowed-out legs, his bulky body, upon which his gay *chasseur* uniform sat ungracefully enough, he looked anything but the ideal light horseman.

Far different was it with the man beside me.



Renaud Bronsard was not tall, nor was his frame especially powerful; but he was well-knit and active, graceful and light of tread as a panther, and his muscles had the endurance of steel. His carriage was erect and military, with a certain indefinable swagger in it that seemed to belong to him of right as one of the best swordsmen of the army. Across the bronzed cheek and determined jaw ran a thin, white seam, the scar of a Uhlan's saber at the battle of Valmy. In every respect he looked exactly what he was, the personification of a dashing trooper of France.

An inkling that some such thoughts as these were passing through my head evidently came to him; for, after a glance at my face he twisted up his mustaches, and squared his shoulders. As we resumed our walk townwards he remarked:

"A good comrade and a faithful friend is Pierre Santron, but *Dieu!* what a figure for the light cavalry! Ha, ha, 'tis comical to realize."

"The post he'd adorn, to *my* fancy, would be the tail of a plow. He'd be an ornament there," I said, the spice of malice in my voice.

"Bah, Georges, thou'rt sore at him for his flings at thy manner of a gentleman. Never lay that up against him, my boy. He did but jest with thee, for he is among those in the squadron who love to enrage thee to see the blood fly into thy smooth cheeks! Wert thou in peril Santron would bare his blade to thy help on the instant. And let me tell thee that thou might'st have much worse assistance."

"But he called me an aristocrat, Renaud," I objected. "'Tis a way he has, he and others, that is not to my liking. Why should they mock me and hail me '*monseigneur*'? No one of them has danced the Carmagnole more heartily than I. No one is more eager to shed his blood for the Republic. Why, then, should they not deem me as much *sans-culotte* as themselves?"

"Dost think, Georges, that were the blooded charger of Barras hobbled alongside the hacks we ride in the regiment here the brutes would take kindly to his company?" Poignet d'Acier asked with a smile.

"I am not talking of the steed of the great Director," I returned impatiently. "And if by citing such a case



thou'rt hinting that I be of more upstart blood than the others, 'tis *not true!* A thorough citizen of the Republic am I from spur to shako. *A bas les aristocrates! Vive l'égalité!* Thou knowest that such are my sentiments."

"Aye, I know," Renaud Bronsard said with a laugh. "But suppose thou wert an aristocrat, Georges. Would it not be then '*vive le roi*' with thee?"

"No, *par Dieu!* that it would not. France before everything. I'd never raise hand for the Bourbons, who could not keep the throne when they had it."

"Yet many gallant swords are still drawn in their cause, Georges," the *maître d'armes* sighed. "Many a brave heart still fights and hopes for their return. What a help they'd be to us here if they'd but come and fight under the tricolor!"

"The sons of the people can do without their aid," I asserted proudly. "We've shown already that courage is not confined to the *noblesse*. Ere we have peace, once more all the world shall know how peasant soldiers can fight."

Renaud Bronsard laughed again.

"Peasants!" he repeated after me. "Well, yes, I suppose that is what thou and I are, my Georges. Though there's little of the child of toil apparent in the white hands Pierre Santron joked thee about but lately. And as for myself I've had naught to do with the fields in my life, save to strip them of forage for my horse."

"I know well thou hast been a soldier all thy life, Renaud," I said enviously. "Can I ever hope to become such a one?"

"Thou'lt arrive there in time, never fear," he reassured me. "Even now there's scarce a better blade in the squadron. When I'm through with thee thou'lt fence like—*Hein!* what a cough I have!"

"Like whom, Poignet d'Acier?" I demanded, as he ceased clearing his throat.

"Like a certain captain I served under in the old days of the monarchy," he said drily. "*He* had a guard no point could pass, and his lunge I never saw parried. Some day, Georges, I hope to make thee as good as he was."



"But his name, Renaud? Thou hast not told me his name," I repeated.

"*Dame!*" he answered, wrinkling his brows, "but I have forgotten it. Names never stick in my poor brain. At any rate thou'lt have time to become his equal before thou'rt dead. How many years can'st count now, Georges."

"Eighteen," I returned, with a sigh. "Would that I were nineteen!"

"And why nineteen?" he demanded curiously.

"Because Pierre Santron would then be only *three* years older than I, instead of *four*," I said. "For each year the red-haired Chouan assumes a century of superiority. And to see him handle that frightful mustache of his one would think him a general of division. 'Tis sickening to watch him twist it while he talks to Co—to a girl I would say."

"Ha! So the Breton visits the house of the baker also," grinned Renaud Bronsard. "I'm afraid thou'lt never be satisfied until thou hast a mustache like his, my Georges."

"Like his! Nay, Renaud, I'd not carry that bristling brush of ugly red hair under my nose to be a sergeant," I rejoined sullenly.

For several paces we walked in silence. "Georges," the *maître d'armes* suddenly demanded, "dost ever think of thy childhood? Do thoughts never come to thee of thy life before I knew thee?"

"Never, Renaud," I said with prompt emphasis, "or if they do I drive them away on the instant. They are not pleasant to look back upon, those times of hunger, rags, kicks, and curses. Thou canst not blame me for not desiring to encourage their recollection."

"Nay, my boy, I meant not to bring up *those* days. I know well how wretched thou wert when I saw thee for the first time, a half-naked *gamin* of the Paris streets. Dost remember, 'twas in the road before the National Convention. Thou and another young imp, leaders apparently of rival factions among your fellows, were tearing the eyes out of one another for—for a crust. *Dieu!* but you fought as furiously as they did at Jemappes."

"And I beat him well, did I not, Renaud?" I



laughed. “*Sacré!* I always feel in the mood to finish what I have begun.”

“Perhaps that strain of thy nature comes to thee honestly,” the *maître d’armes* observed. “But we were talking of the years before thou camest to Paris. Dost recall none of the people and the places thou sawest then?”

“Aye, I mind me of old Rigaud and his beast of a wife,” I returned with a snap of my teeth. “They were kind to me, long, long ago, and I think at one time they were a trifle in awe of me. They got bravely over such feelings. I remember well the day old Mère Rigaud first beat me. She said,—hold, I can repeat her very words. They were ‘Since there is no more money come to pay for thy keep, and thou art no longer a source of profit, I may as well have some fun out of thee; so jump while I give thee the whip, thou cursed little’—”

I stopped abruptly in my speech, turning a pair of startled eyes upon Poignet d’Acier.

“Well,” he said impatiently, “what ails thee? I see nothing in what the old wife said to cause thee to stare at me as Captain Mirador does at the ankles of every shop-wench. What has thee?”

“Nothing, nothing, Renaud,” I said confusedly.

“Nay, it was something. Out with it at once,” he commanded.

“Well then, here it is. Only, don’t laugh, Renaud. But upon my faith, the word of Mère Rigaud to me was ‘thou cursed little *aristocrate!*’”

The lips of Renaud Bronsard were tightly compressed for a moment and then widened into a smile.

“Bah!” he said lightly. “People called everything that displeased them thus in those days.”

“True, Renaud, I never thought of that,” I replied, much comforted. “Why, now that I remember, I have heard her call the pig, or the donkey, even a block of wood that turned her ax by the name.”

“And so she beat thee, Georges, the Mère Rigaud,” he said in musing tones.

“Aye, that she did, and her husband also,” I responded, “till I split the head of Père Rigaud with a stick from one of his own fagots, and bade them *adieu* forever. Then I came to Paris, penniless and un-



friended and had well-nigh died of hunger and exposure, for I slept in the streets wherever night found me."

"*Sang-Dieu!*" it is a mystery to me how thou wast able to live," put in the *maître d'armes*.

"I managed it," I said proudly. "'Twas not so hard after I grew used to the ways of the town. On the day that thou chanced upon me, Renaud, I was fighting my way to the post of chief *gamin* of our section."

"I bless the hour that I saw thee, Georges," he answered with emotion. "I liked thy manner of fighting and thy air and tongue reminded me of—of an old comrade of mine. So I took thee for my own. Thy history from that day I know well. How my old mother cared for thee until thou wert of an age to join the regiment, when I sent for thee and had thy name entered upon the rolls of the squadron. A private thou art now, but under the new order of things I hope to see thee one day wearing thy epaulets."

"Thou'lt see it, Renaud Bronsard, or thou'lt waste a few tears over the body of Georges Luc," I said confidently. "One or the other I am resolved upon."

"But tell me, my Georges," Poignet d'Acier insisted, "hast thou no memory of the days before thou went to the dwelling of the Rigauds? Canst bring to mind no person nor place thou knewest before the wood-cutter had thee in charge?"

"Renaud," I answered slowly, "there *are* some things, but it seems to me that they must be dreams. They come to my brain even now, at times, yet so dimly that they can never have been real. Visions of a great and splendid *château*, of a wide park and trees as mighty as those at Versailles. At rare intervals I see the place still in my slumbers, and *then* I am always a little, little child. And there is a woman there, a woman with great blue eyes and golden hair."

"Like thine own, my boy?" interrupted the veteran, his face paling under its mask of tan.

"Nay, Renaud, eyes and hair more beautiful than ever mortal woman had, and a face and voice such that makes me her worshiper. While I dwelt with the Rigauds I saw her often in my sleep, indeed almost nightly at the first. She many a time appeared to me as I crouched shivering in the doorway of



some inhospitable Parisian mansion, or nestled, more happily, at the bottom of some empty box or barrel. To think of her, in those days, was my greatest happiness—I—I.” Then something came into my throat and I seemed to choke.

Poignet d’Acier coughed awkwardly as I paused.

“Well?” he said impatiently.

“Renaud,” I proceeded in unwilling accents, “thou knowest well what one could see daily upon the *Place de la Révolution* during the bloody September when they shaved the aristocrats. I need not tell thee that we street urchins were always at hand, curious to view the show, rollicking about, shouting and jeering at the knitting women as they clicked their needles in time to the whiz of the knife.”

“Aye, trust a boy for being everywhere that he should *not* be,” grunted the *maître d’armes*.

“Well, one day I was there, close up to the guillotine. The throng was so dense that I could not see the scaffold. I cried out and demanded that so good a patriot as myself should be aided to view the deaths of our tyrants. My impudence caught the fancy of a giant *sans-culotte*. He seized me, and raised me to a seat upon his shoulder, crying to the people to look at the young incarnation of the national spirit. They cheered me, but I, unheeding, gazed eagerly toward the next of the condemned.

“Renaud, a woman was upon the platform. Her eyes she had directed to the skies, but at the cry of the people she turned them to where I sat, upheld by the filthy ruffian, and our glances met. She smiled and held out her hands to me—and they dragged her down and bound her upon the trestle. As they grasped her, her eyes gave the first caress I can remember. I struggled to go to her, but the *sans-culotte* held me fast, and raising me high above his head, he forced me to watch. I saw the knife descend and the basket held another head. Then the brute placed me on the ground and impelled me into the crowd with a hearty kick. After that I never went to see *la Guillotine*. When the tumbrils rolled I fled from them.”

“But I see nothing unusual in all this,” Poignet d’Acier said, glancing at me uneasily. “The heads of many women fell in the days of The Terror; and I



have often myself seen the men hold up *gamins* to mock at them. Why, then, shouldst thou recall this so particularly?"

"Because the woman of the scaffold was the same I had seen in my dreams, Renaud Bronsard," I answered solemnly. "There was no mistaking her. And she knew *me*, too. Was it not strange?"

The *maître d'armes* swore under his breath, but he made me no answer. "And so occasionally I wonder over the matter," I went on, "and now, whenever she comes to me at night——"

"To the devil with thy dreams and wonderings," broke in the veteran testily. "'Think no more of such foolish visions. I leave thee at this corner.'" (For we had entered the town.) "See that thou art in time for thy fencing lesson to-night, and not ten minutes behind-hand as thou wast yesterday."

"I'll be there, Renaud," I promised, half offended. "If I fatigued thee with my recollections, forgive me. 'Twas thou who started them by asking of my parents. I would that I knew who they were, Renaud," I added wistfully.

"Chut! thou hast all the parents a *chasseur* of Dameremont could wish. What kinder mother canst thou ask than *La République*? what better father than the Tricolor?"

With a wave of the hand he left me, and I gazed wonderingly after him, for the veteran's lips were twitching, and I thought I saw a tear upon the bronze of each of his scarred cheeks. And my lips began to tremble also, and my eyes to grow dim—for this recollection of my early life was all that ever took the *sans-culotte* out of me.

Tossed, a child, into the streets of Paris, where every one seemed to hate *l'aristocrate*, I had learned to hate him also—though I had had no intimate acquaintance with his class, man or woman. Had it not been for military training, I had been as great a leveler as old Marat himself.

The tough school of the Army of the Alps had put little of Christian tenderness into me, but the memory of this woman, who caressed me as she died, always made a milksop of me. When I thought of her I wondered whether the religion of the Priests, who preached



tenderness and forgiveness was, if not better, at least as good as the worship of the Goddess of Reason.

But to these things I had given little thought. My mission in life, as I read it then, was to obey without hesitation the commands of my officers, to see that my weapons were kept in the highest state of efficiency, to give the best of care to the wretched bay mare entrusted to me by the Republic, and to throw my whole heart and soul into the fencing lessons I took under Poignet d'Acier.

It mattered little to me that our enemies outnumbered us and our leader was as yet untried. Far more important to my peace of mind was it to be certain that my graceful black cloth shako with its orange pendant should be set upon my powdered head at the most military angle, that my green jacket, trimmed with white braiding and adorned in front with five rows of convex buttons, though sadly worn and weather-stained should yet show off my wiry figure to its best advantage; that my broad sash of green and orange should lie smooth about my waist and be coquettishly knotted behind the left hip; that my trousers should fit tight to the leg and disappear without wrinkling into the legs of my tasseled hussar boots. *En fin* I wished to be a *bon-garçon* with the girls, a good soldier for the Republic, to have a strong guard and a *riposte* like lightning for my own honor and my own safety—and besides I wanted a mustache so that I should be called *sans barbe* and boy no more.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### BEAUTY BY THE WAYSIDE.

THE next day came the order to march. Before us lay the lower Alps, held by the Austrians—twice our numbers. But what cared we? Beyond the mountains and the hostile bayonets lay the fertile fields of Lombardy and the treasure-house, cities of Tuscany—food and wealth for a starving and unpaid army!

On the morning of the 20th Germinal (April 9th), our second squadron moved into the enemy's territory



and advanced *en reconnaissance* along the road to Valtri, preparing the way for the division Laharpe. Sixteen *chasseurs* under Sergeant Roussel formed a flanking party, and followed a broad path that wound through the forests far to the left of the squadron's line of march.

With this body I rode, and Poignet d'Acier was by my side.

"The little man they sent from Paris turns out not so badly after all, eh, Georges?" he observed, while our horses plodded soberly along the unvarying ascent of the way. "He's managed to give us better filling for our stomachs than we had before he came, he's procured us some little advances on the arrears of our pay, and now it looks as if he'll have us at work before long. Despite what they tell of his curious taste in affairs matrimonial, *vive General Bonaparte!*"

"Did'st thou not hear them say last night at the Bonnet Rouge," I whispered to Bronsard, "that this twenty-six-year-old Bonaparte told our old generals that they knew not the art of war?"

"Aye, boy!" chuckled the *maître d'armes*, "I heard how the pale-faced little artilleryman suggested to the fierce Massena, the brilliant Laharpe, the bull-dog Augereau that they could not fight. And *diable*, he proved it by tearing to pieces their last campaign. He can talk, Georges, that little general, only let him fight half so well and Italy belongs to us. *Nom d'un pipe!* While I listened to his bulletin I felt as I did at Jemappes, when Dampierre gathered the broken battalions and they charged singing the Marseillaise!"

"How I'd like to have been there!" I remarked regretfully; "what great things it has been your lot to see, Renaud!"

"Much good you'd have done, my boy," laughed Poignet d'Acier. "Not that you'd have run, your blood is warrant for that. But you'd have stood little chance with the Kaiserlicks at fifteen. Now, thanks to what you've learned from me, you might come off well if you had to do with an Austrian recruit."

"A recruit indeed!" I said in tones of indignation. "Wait; only wait, Renaud Bronsard, and I'll show you that I don't fear the biggest horseman that wears the white coat,"



"Oh! you'll prove a perfect Achilles, I've no doubt of that," he returned, with a twinkle in his eye. "Must not be too savage though, Georges, and for my sake must refrain from eating all thou killest. 'Tis a pity that the custom of putting prisoners to ransom has fallen into disuse. After one campaign thou would'st be able to buy half Paris."

"We may be able to do that after all," I observed gaily. "What was it the general said about wealth awaiting us in Italy?"

"Never count on that, Georges," the *maître d'armes* replied somewhat sourly. "There's wealth and to spare, but there's little of it that will come to our pockets. I'll wager five to one that within a few days there will be strict orders out forbidding all plunder. Those who gain riches in war must have rank even above that of a colonel. And 'tis a pity, too, for in this land of Italy there is no lack of gold and silver. *Sang-dieu!* what wouldn't I give for an hour's pillage of the cathedral at Milan! Think of it, Georges, they have there life-size statues of saints and angels in massive silver!"

"No telling what may arrive," I said consolingly. And my eyes shone with the same greedy light that flashed in the dark orbs of Poignet d'Acier.

"Not that this looks like a promising district for such pastime," Poignet d'Acier averred, regarding the forest road with disfavor.

The country through which we were marching was mountainous and thickly wooded. The road climbed over hills, descended and crossed ravines, wound around spurs of the mountains and traversed level plateaus.

It was after twelve o'clock when we topped a rise in the road and came suddenly upon an open space. On one side of the way the ground had been bared of trees and underbrush and was divided off into several small fields. In their midst stood a low, white-walled farmhouse, with a thatched roof, from whose wide chimney a curl of smoke rose into the air.

Two women in peasant dress, with bright-colored kerchiefs on their heads stood in the doorway, shading their eyes with their hands, as they regarded us. One of them presently withdrew into the house



"Behold a chance for a hot meal that I sha'n't neglect," Sergeant Roussel declared, and with a shrill whistle he recalled our advance and the flankers.

Riding leisurely down the narrow lane we pulled up before the house and swung ourselves from our saddles.

The woman at the door stood with folded arms, surveying us with a dull and apathetic eye. She was beyond the middle age, brown-skinned and wrinkled, with thick gray hair showing under her gaudy head-dress. She did not look poverty-stricken, as so many of these mountaineers do, for on her toil-hardened hands were several thick gold rings, and heavy circles of the same metal hung from her ears. Her dress, though of coarse materials, was strong and new, and her apron and head-covering were worked in flowers of many-colored silk.

The sergeant had left a *chasseur* on guard at the entrance to the lane. Ordering another to take his station beyond the house in the direction of the woods, he addressed the woman.

"Good day, mother," he cried in the mountain *patois*. "I and these men with me are tired, and would rest by your fireside."

"You may enter," the woman replied stolidly.

The sergeant clanked through the doorway, and we followed close at his heels.

The room we entered was wide and low, and by the daylight that struggled through the small, diamond-shaped panes of the two windows and the blaze of the fire that burned on the hearth, we could see that though the appointments of the place were rude they were scrupulously clean. The hard floor of mixed earth and mortar had been swept, the long wooden table and the stools and benches standing about had been scrubbed, the plates and crockery on the dresser in the corner reflected the light of the fire. The walls were without ornament, save for a rude painting of the Madonna that hung in the center of the chimney above the fireplace, and a long gun, with powder-flask and shot-pouch attached, that rested in slings on the wall opposite.

This weapon, I judged, probably belonged to a sturdy young fellow who sat on a stool before the fire,



and who seemed to take no notice of our coming, but continued lazily watching the blaze with his back turned toward us. The young female, whom we had seen when first the house was sighted, was not visible. Probably she was beyond a closed door set in the farther wall, that doubtless led to another part of the house.

Sergeant Roussel strode across to the sitter before the fire and clapped him rudely on the shoulder.

"'Tis comfortable ground you've taken up, no doubt, my lad," he cried, "but you must move your camp and make way for your superiors. Draw off to one side, and let the warmth get to me and my *chasseurs*." The young fellow rose at once and gave place, displaying as he did so the proportions of a splendid, almost Herculean figure. Indeed he was a regular giant, and towered head and shoulders above every man in our detachment. He was a handsome young peasant, too, with a well-shaped head covered by locks of curly black hair finely set upon his broad shoulders. His face was by no means intellectual, but his expression was mild and good-natured, his manner humble, and he seemed to bear the sergeant no ill-will for ousting him from his place by the hearth. For the rest, he wore the dress of a mountain hunter, short jacket, wide breeches, leathern gaiters reaching to the knee, and heavy shoes with the soles well-furnished with nails.

"Come, old girl," the sergeant went on, addressing the woman of the house. "We're hungry, and will be all the better for some hot food. Get the pot on the fire at once, and give us the best you have, too. *Sacré!* It's not every day that you have the honor to entertain soldiers of the Republic."

Whether the woman appreciated the honor our presence conferred upon her dwelling she did not state; but she went to work briskly enough at the sergeant's command, and soon the pleasant fumes of a stew of meat and vegetables began to fill the apartment.

While our meal was being prepared, we lounged about the room, chatting, yawning and wishing that the food were ready. The young Italian had retreated to a corner and sat examining us with an air of child-like curiosity that it was amusing to note in one



of his years, for he must have been over twenty-five.

At last the woman addressed him, and from her speech it appeared that she was his mother.

"The dinner is cooked now," she observed. "Hither, son Rocco, and aid me prepare the table."

Rocco moved at her word, and in a few moments a number of bowls filled with the stew were smoking on the table, one for each man. We drew up benches and stools and began to eat with ravenous appetite.

"*Sapristi*, but you're a wonderful cook, mother!" Sergeant Roussel declared, after eating a few mouthfuls. "Better fare than this one could not ask were he a member of the Directory!"

The old woman made a grimace that was intended for a smile. Evidently she was pleased at the compliment.

"But it's dry work, eating with nothing to wash the food down," Roussel continued. "Can't you find some wine about the house, mother? I'll wager that one who lives as well as you do has not an empty cellar."

The woman drew a key from her pocket and left the room by the door I have mentioned. In about five minutes she returned, bearing a large stone jug.

Rocco placed drinking cups on the table and his mother proceeded to fill them. We drank, and found that the liquor was not to be despised. It was wine of the country, strong but palatable. Every *chasseur* seemed to relish it, and the woman was kept busy replenishing our cups.

Sergeant Roussel, who had already disposed of three glasses and who wanted a fourth, was not slow in noticing this fact.

"You need help in serving us, mother," he cried. "Where's the petticoat who was with you when we rode up? Trot her out, and let her aid you to fill our goblets. If she be young and handsome, so much the better."

The old woman hesitated.

Before she could answer Rocco spoke, for the first time, in a strong, deep-chested voice.

"It must not be!" he said resolutely. "It were not well that the soldiers should see Aliandra."



“Must not be, you dog?” shouted the Sergeant. “*Sac-à papier!* Bring her out at once, do you hear, hag? or mayhap I’ll take the fancy to see what sort of a bonfire this hovel of yours will make.”

What effect this speech of the Sergeant’s would have produced I cannot say, for at this moment the door of the inner room opened and the cause of the discussion appeared before us.

Involuntarily I arose from my chair, and unconsciously I did homage to the woman who entered. And she was worth it.

The girl was perhaps seventeen years old. Her stature barely reached the middle height of her sex; but her form, graceful as a fawn’s and straight as the line of a battalion on parade, made her look tall. Under her coarse peasant dress were a hundred beauty curves of perfectly proportioned shoulders, swelling virgin bosom, pliant waist, hips of a Psyche, and wood-nymph’s limbs. She had laid aside the kerchief worn upon her head while she stood at the door, and her face was plainly visible. Truly, this countenance was one of wondrous loveliness.

Though she kept her eyes fixed upon the floor her head was too haughtily set upon her white, rounded neck to give her an altogether humble appearance. A mass of raven tresses crowned it, confined beneath a golden net. The forehead they shaded was broad and low, its ivory hue enhanced by the jetty lines of her perfectly marked eyebrows. Long, curving lashes swept down upon the adorable cheeks whose faint rose tint grew deeper as a low hum of admiration passed round the table. The nose was slightly aquiline, its contour admirably chiseled. The small mouth would have been imperious in its expression had the mind of the girl been free from alarming doubts, but now the lips, like scarlet blossoms, were trembling slightly, despite the firmness of character promised by the strong, white chin.

She came forward with an easy carriage, yet with a certain air of shrinking timidity that made my heart beat in sympathy for her. Her little feet made scarcely any sound upon the hard floor, and I noticed that instead of the clumsy sabots of the mountain girls she wore a pair of coquettishly dainty slippers. Up to that



day I can truthfully swear that I had never dreamed there could be such a pair of ankles as the short peasant skirt displayed to me.

The hot blood surged to my head and I trembled in every limb as two great, dark, appealing eyes had flashed a sudden glance into mine. I was the only one who had risen.

She spoke to Rocco in a musical, sonorous voice, whose accent betokened a breeding and refinement that seemed to me like a memory of the past.

"Be patient, good Rocco," she said. "The work is too much for Mother Giannetta, and it is but fitting that she should have aid."

"But, lady——" he began.

"Hush!" There was command in her tones, and he was silent.

Taking the flagon from the hands of the old woman she moved swiftly about the table, deftly refilling the cups held out to her by the *chasseurs*.

All of the men appeared impressed with her loveliness, but none so greatly as Sergeant Roussel. He drained to the dregs the goblet she filled for him and then held it out for more, rising as he did so.

"To your health, my beauty!" he cried, his face red from what he had imbibed and the fire of unholy desires beginning to kindle in his eyes. "To your bright eyes I drain this cup, and devil take the man who'd not risk hell for them!"

As he spoke he attempted to pass his arm about the girl's waist.

With a quick twist of her body she evaded him and sprang beyond his reach. Then, her head thrown back, her face white as death, her eyes blazing scornful disdain, she faced him as haughtily as any empress. Her bosom rose and fell in swift emotion, and her breath seemed to come between her lips in rapid gasps. A moment she stood there, her small hands clenched upon the flagon, the very personification of insulted maidenhood.

Then her mouth set in a thin red line, a wave of crimson flooded her neck and face. She dropped the jug, made a step forward and dealt the astonished Roussel a ringing slap across the mouth.

At the same moment Rocco uttered a furious impre-



cation and sprang toward the gun that hung on the wall. But he did not reach it. Three *chasseurs* were upon him in a twinkling. I remember well the men who seized him. They were Jean Guyot, Pierre David and "Loup," ruffians long inured to scenes like this. They bore him back, but collecting his strength he seemed about to shake them off when Amédée Grenier dealt him a savage blow on the forehead with the butt of a pistol. He fell under the stroke and lay senseless upon the floor, the blood gushing all over his rigid face.

The girl, Aliandra as he had called her, ran to him and would have knelt beside his body. But before she could do so the strong arms of Sergeant Roussel raised her from the floor.

"So you answer the caress of a soldier of the Republic with a slap, do you, Mistress Pretty-face?" he growled. "Such conduct deserves some disciplining, and you and I are going to have a private conversation together in the room beyond."

Chuckling hoarsely he started to bear his victim to the open door. My carbine hung at my side, and it was unslung and cocked almost of its own volition.

"Sergeant Roussel!" I said, and my tone, though low, made him halt on the instant. "If you do not immediately put down the lady you hold in your arms, I will break your head with a bullet!"

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PEASANT WOMAN'S HOARD.

A CHORUS of oaths from a dozen enraged *chasseurs* greeted my action, but my voice rose above them all as I spoke again:

"To me, Poignet d'Acier!" I cried. And the clicking lock of the *maître-d'armes'* weapon gave instant answer to my appeal.

For a second Sergeant Roussel glared into my eyes, a veritable hell of baffled lust and hatred in his glance. Then he must have seen from the look on my face that the shot was coming.



With a choking oath he released the girl, who rushed at once across the room, sprang through the door and slammed it behind her. We heard the bolts rasp in their sockets on the other side.

Calmly I uncocked my carbine, replaced it in its sling, and glanced around the room. Poignet d'Acier, his mouth set in a grim smile, regarded me with a gaze full of amusement. In every other face I read anger and disapproval of what I had done.

Sergeant Roussel, no longer menaced with death at my hands, was quick to find his tongue.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he shouted, threatening me with his fist. "Curse you for a spoil-sport, you young limb of Satan! You mutiny, do you, and threaten your commanding officer? May I roast forever if I don't have you shot for this!"

The voice of my comrades chimed in.

"A rare nerve has Sans-Barbe, on my word," commented "Loup."

"*Chien!* To snatch such a dainty bit from us!" exclaimed Pierre David.

"If he wanted none of it himself, well and good, but to do as he did—*Sapristi!*" from Jean Guyot.

"Silence!" called Poignet d'Acier suddenly. And at the sound of that voice the room became as still as a column awaiting the word to charge. When Renaud Bronsard told men to be silent they generally complied. If they did not, he made them so forever.

"Speak up, lad," the *maître-d'armes* resumed with a suspicion of a sneer in his tone. "Tell the citizens why you acted as you did. They don't seem to understand."

"Sergeant Roussel," I said, looking straight into the eyes of that furious sub-officer. "In what you said just now you erred. I did not mutiny. I did not threaten my commanding officer. I simply forced a drunken brute, placed by some mistake of nature in the body of a man, to give up a lady who would honor him if she condescended to wipe her shoes on his filthy form. As for having me shot, you are welcome to do that if you think it in your power. Only Colonel Billot will have something to say about it. And I won't be backward in using my tongue at the court-martial."

The sergeant paled noticeably. He could not afford



to have his conduct aired before a military tribunal and I knew it.

“As for you others,” I turned on the rest, “you may think what you please, but you’d best be guarded in what you say. Pierre David has gone too far as it is. At the first opportunity you’ll answer to me for that little word ‘*chien*,’ Citizen David.”

“As you please, Citizen Sans-Barbe,” Pierre David answered, shrugging his shoulders. Though a fiend incarnate when his passions were excited, he was no coward.

“Best have it over on the spot,” suggested Poignet d’Acier. “How say you, Roussel, can we not let them fight? ’Tis no matter of losing a campaign.”

“With the utmost pleasure,” Sergeant Roussel declared, his eyes dancing with malice. He knew that Pierre David was a fair swordsman, and he had no objection to seeing him run me through.

“To the open then,” sang out the *maître d’armes*, and all hands poured out of the farmhouse. No time was wasted in preliminaries, and in a few moments Pierre David and I were face to face in the open space before the door, saber in hand.

Dearly would Sergeant Roussel and all the squad, except Renaud Bronsard, have loved to witness my death, but they were doomed to disappointment. For I killed Pierre David dead at the first parade. It takes longer to tell than it did to do it. The affair lasted but a moment. Merely a clash of steel, a smothered curse, and Pierre David lying upon the grass with blood flying from his pierced chest.

As I wiped my crimsoned blade I cast a glance of invitation upon the others.

“Next!” I said with a mocking smile. But no one accepted the challenge. Pierre David had been above the average, and all present knew his record.

The silence that fell upon them was broken by the hard laugh of Poignet d’Acier.

“Next!” he echoed after me. “*Sapristi*, what a man-eater the boy is become!”

“By the Republic! But that was well done for a first assay, my Georges!” he breathed in my ear as the rest re-entered the house. “You were through him ere the eye could follow you, and your point came out



at his back as he parried. I see my labor has not been thrown away, and in time I may be able to make a fencer of you."

"Will they let *it* lie there, Renaud?" I asked suddenly.

"It?" his eyes following the glance of my own. "Oh, you mean the late Citizen David. No, Roussel will have him put under the ground before we move, I expect. If he has any sense of humor, he'll detail you to perform the duty, my boy. How you'd relish burying your dead! There he goes into the hut now. I'll follow and suggest it to him. Come along."

We re-entered the house, arm in arm, behind the rest of our comrades, who had flocked in after Sergeant Roussel.

The wounded Rocco had raised himself on one elbow, and was gazing about in a confused manner, while his mother knelt by his side, sopping his head with a towel. At sight of our uniforms, intelligence returned to his face, his eyes grew steady, and his mouth set vindictively.

Sergeant Roussel marked the mountaineer's expression, and took prompt measures to ensure obedience to the orders he was about to issue. He drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it, and thrust it into Rocco's face.

"Get up at once, dog of an Italian, and do as you're bid, or 'twill be the worse for you," he said roughly.

The peasant staggered to an upright position.

"You've a spade and mattock?" the sergeant continued.

Rocco nodded sullenly.

"Bring them out!"

Still covered by the menacing pistol, the mountaineer reeled to a corner of the room, opened the door of a sort of closet, and dragged from its depths a clumsy pick-ax and a spade.

"Are these what you need, Excellency?" he asked.

"They'll answer. Carry them out of doors. You, Guyot and Jardon, attend him, and if he makes any trial of an escape, or turns sulky, wash his head with lead. Hold!" as Rocco shouldered the implements and advanced uncertainly toward the door. "Reach the jug from the floor yonder and give him to drink. His strength seems pretty well taken out of him."



I held out the wine pitcher to the Italian lad, who took a long pull at its contents. Then, without consulting Sergeant Roussel's eye, I bade him sit down, and, taking a cloth from his mother, I bound up his wounded head.

This attention, coming from one of his unwelcome guests, seemed to puzzle him; his eyes turned upon me from time to time with a look of patient wonder in their dark depths. I finished and stepped back.

"Quite patched up, eh?" snapped Sergeant Roussel. "Get up, hound, and follow me. I trust Private Sansbarbe has put you into condition to do the work I have for you."

The sergeant led the way straight to the rear of the garden. There, stopping at a spot shadowed by the spreading branches of a rugged oak, he turned to Rocco, who had come quietly under the vigilant eyes of Privates Guyot and Jardon, saying abruptly, "Here pig, dig a grave!"

The wine had brought back the color to Rocco's face, but at the words of Roussel it paled again.

"A—a grave?" he stammered.

"Aye, a grave!" our commander returned, with a cruel chuckle. "Dig it deep and make it *long*, long enough for the body of a giant like yourself."

The mountaineer cast a desperate glance about him as though he meditated an attempt at escape. The promptly leveled carbines of his guardians instantly showed him that no hope of flight was left. His eyes grew haggard and appealing, great beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead, his face grew deathly pale.

"Come, set to work," the sergeant said with impatience. "Dig, I say, or I shall order the men to fire."

"I am ready," said the peasant, folding his arms with an air that did not want dignity. "I dig not my own grave."

Sergeant Roussel gazed at him for a moment with a look of wonder. Then he laughed, drew four of the men aside, and whispered some rapid orders. They moved away at once toward the house.

Still Rocco stood with folded arms, patiently awaiting the death he was sure must follow. The tramp of feet was presently heard, our circle opened, and four



*chasseurs* advancing between us, laid down the gory body of Pierre David beside his last earthly resting-place.

"Dig *his!*" guffawed the sergeant.

The face of the peasant changed, as if by magic. He pointed a shaking finger at the dead man's face.

"His! one of her insulters! Who killed him?" he cried.

Poignet d'Acier silently laid his hand upon my shoulder. Before I could prevent him, Rocco seized my fingers and pressed them to his lips. From that moment the devotion of the peasant lad was mine.

Seizing shovel and spade, Rocco dug the grave of one he hated.

The corpse was lowered into the hole at once, the dead man's saber was placed across his breast, and the sergeant gave Rocco a sign to shovel back the earth. No prayer was read, no requiem was sung. Pierre David had lived on the worst of terms with his fellows, and there was no man present who cared to say "God rest his soul." Indeed, in that republican army, the only God we worshiped was Victory.

I had judged that, the burial over, we would at once take the road again, but it did not happen so. On the contrary, the sergeant, cautioning Jardon and Guyot still to keep a watch on Rocco's movements, led us back to the house, and entering, called loudly for the old woman.

She appeared at once and stood before him submissively awaiting his commands.

"What is your Excellency's pleasure?" she inquired.

"Old girl," said the sergeant, "before we go, there's a small favor we can do you, and *par Dieu!* you sha'n't find us backward in rendering it. You have, of a certainty, some store of money, large or small, hidden away somewhere. Living as you do, you have no need of it, and the possession of it is sure to expose you to the attacks of robbers, who, I know, infest these mountains. You'll feel much safer and better at ease if you know you've nothing in the house they can desire. So produce your cash and we'll take it away with us. The robbers will never get it *then*, you may be sure."



The old woman clasped her hands.

"Indeed, Excellency, you are wrong," she cried. "There is no money here, I swear it. How should such poor people as we are have money?"

"Say you so?" Sergeant Roussel returned, laughing, "I fear that our advent and the trouble of entertaining us have disturbed your memory. But we'll soon have it working smoothly again. Tie up the boy, a couple of you, and be brisk about doing it."

Loup and Raoul Miallis went to work, and presently Rocco lay bound before the fire.

"Take off his shoes," directed the sergeant, and Loup, grinning horribly, tore the coverings from his victim's feet.

I pressed close to Poignet d'Acier.

"What are they about to do, Renaud?" I whispered.

"You'll see," he replied in an undertone. "And do you keep silent this time, Georges; 'tis no place for interference. Not that it will go very far, for I judge Roussel won't have to more than scorch the lad before she gives in."

Rocco's mother had viewed the binding of her son without protest, and seemed at a loss to account for the proceeding.

"You are sure you have no money then?" Sergeant Roussel asked in what was, for him, a gentle tone.

"Sure, oh, yes! very, very sure, Excellency."

The sergeant nodded to Loup, who caught a burning brand from the fire and held it close to one of Rocco's feet.

The young man writhed as he felt the heat, and his face was contorted with pain. But he compressed his lips and made no sound. His mother, probably because of failing eyesight, did not comprehend the torture her son was enduring, and remained blinking placidly at the sergeant.

Loup held the brand nearer, and the sickening smell of burned flesh greeted our nostrils. It was too much for human nerves to withstand, and a mad scream of suffering was wrung from the prostrate Rocco.

Then, at last, his mother understood. She rushed at Loup like a wild-cat, and taking him unprepared thrust him backward into the fire. Without looking



to see what became of him she fell on her knees before the sergeant.

"For the love of God, Excellency, have pity! I lied, I confess that I lied! I have money, and I will give you all of it! But for the love of the Madonna, release my boy!" she screamed.

"I thought you would remember," Sergeant Roussel remarked, casting an amused eye at the luckless Loup, who was scrambling hastily out of the fireplace and cursing horribly as he brushed away and beat out the flame that had caught in his uniform.

"Bring the purse, then, and the youngster's feet shall have no more warming. But beware how you trifle with me this time, for if I have reason to doubt you, I'll set this dog-kennel of yours ablaze and leave you and yours to roast in the ruins. So have a care!"

There was no need of further threats or tortures. From the inner room the woman brought a bag, heavy with silver, that seemed to content even Sergeant Roussel. He smiled as he finished weighing the pouch in his hand, and going to the table he emptied the coins out on the boards, calling Poignet d'Acier to help him count them.

That task was soon disposed of, and the money was impartially divided among us, the men on sentry duty of course coming in for their share. My sense of right rebelled at these bandit proceedings, and when my name was called I hung back for a moment, unwilling to receive my portion of the plunder.

Poignet d'Acier's hand grasped my shoulder and he urged me forward, whispering angrily:

"*Dame!* To the table with you, Georges, and make no scruple at doing as the rest have done. It's share and share alike, you know, and every one of us must be in equally deep. If it comes to the colonel's ear, we'll be shot, and it won't do for you to hang back. Quick, take your share before thy comrades notice."

So I pocketed my part of the old woman's hoard, and very heavy the coins made my pocket—at least it seemed so to me.

The farmhouse had now no further charm for us. We took a farewell drink of wine all round. Then we clanked out of the place and got to horse.



Our videttes were called in, their spoil handed over to them, and we resumed our advance in the same formation we had followed in the morning.

And so we rode away from the farmhouse in the mountains. Up the lane out into the road we clattered, while ever that accursed silver seemed to burn my skin through my trousers.

*Dieu!* how weighty it was! And it grew more weighty with every second. The motion of my horse made the coins move every now and then. *Parbleu!* they were making my leg sore as they pressed upon it.

I could no longer endure the torment. "*Hola, mon sergent!*" I cried suddenly. "A request."

"What now?" Roussel demanded, turning a sour look over his shoulder.

"I cannot find my bag of flints, and remember now that I laid them upon the table as I ate. I would go back for them, with your permission."

"Devil take such carelessness!" he grumbled. "Go then, but be sure I shall not forget your being lax in such a matter."

I wheeled my mare and dashed back to the cottage at a reckless pace. Upon a stone beside the doorway sat Mother Giannetta, her face buried in her hands. Sobs shook her shoulders, she was weeping bitterly. Neither Rocco nor the girl were to be seen.

As I reined up she leaped to her feet, her tear-stained face distorted with terror. Without a word I drew from my pocket my share of the spoil we had wrenched from her, added to it every sou of the scanty allowance on my pay that I had lately received, and dropped the whole at her feet.

I stayed not to hear her thanks, I did not even look at her again, but spurred away to overtake my comrades, penniless, yet light of heart.



## CHAPTER V.

## LANDLORD GIACOMO.

SLOWLY we rode, two by two, along the narrow mountain road. The wine had loosened the tongues and quickened the wits of the *chasseurs*, jokes, sallies and repartees flew from one end of the column to the other, and the march was enlivened by song and story. Amid the mirth I alone was silent. Several attempts of Poignet d'Acier's to engage me in conversation I either heeded not or let pass unanswered. Finally the *maître d'armes* grew impatient of my reticent mood, and grasping me by the arm he shook me roughly in the saddle, exclaiming at the same time :

"*Milles bombes*, what in the name of the devil has come over the boy ! Dost dream of the little Jarbeau, left behind at Nice, dost long for her black eyes and cherry lips ? *Pouf !* Georges, thou'rt forgotten by this time ? "

I smiled faintly.

"Wrong, Poignet d'Acier, my thoughts have ceased to stray in the direction of Cosette Jarbeau. She belongs to the past, *mon ami*."

"But if not on woman—?" The veteran stopped abruptly in his speech and scanned my countenance with frowning brow.

"Georges," he said sternly when some seconds had passed, "you're never regretting that your steel was wet to-day, and you're not wishing back again the dog you started on his way to Monsieur Lucifer, his master ? "

"No, Renaud Bronsard !" I answered on the instant. "Pierre David disturbs me not a whit. He also is of the past."

"I might have known it," Poignet d'Acier muttered. "For all the world like my old captain ! Tell me, then, my Georges, what disquiets thee ? "

"That which happened at the cottage yonder, Renaud, *Diantre*, I had no idea that *this* was war ! "

"Nor is it," he replied quickly. "Only a part of it,



as you will learn, Georges. I understand how it is with you, I've felt the same myself when I was young at the trade. But I'm past that long since, and I tell you frankly, that the sooner you banish all such emotions from your heart, the better for your future. 'Tis hard for the old woman, I grant, to have her savings wrenched from her. But 'tis not we who are to blame. 'Tis the fault of her master, the King of Sardinia. He makes war on the Republic."

"Then why did the Adjutant-Major read out such emphatic orders against pillaging, and why is a fusillade promised to those who are caught at it?" I asked.

"Simply that they may take care *not* to be caught, Georges," answered the *maître d'armes*. "Bah! young simpleton! dost imagine that General Bonaparte himself doesn't know that the whole army pants for the spoil of Italy? *Sang-dieu!* Our word to the descendants of the Romans is to be 'Disgorge,' and no one knows it better than our little general!"

"Thinkest then, Renaud," I asked astonished, "that General Bonaparte will line his pockets too? Surely not in such manner as we have done to-day."

"No, not exactly in the same way," the *maître d'armes* answered. "He'll go at it in this fashion. After we have well drubbed the Piedmontese and the 'white-coats' there'll be a peace patched up, and they'll have to pay the Republic an indemnity. A good part of that will stick to the General's hands, I'll warrant you. And as it all comes out of the people's pockets 'tis the same in the end, one way or the other. Dost see?"

"But the women, Renaud, how about the women?" I asked. "Dost approve such actions as Roussel would have perpetrated back there had I not stepped in?"

"No, by the kiss of that keen female called *La Guillotine*, that I do not," he said emphatically. "Whatever man can obtain from maid, widow, or wife, that let him take and be certain of no forbidding from me. But to coerce a woman is a different matter, and I'll none of it."

"Then you'd have stopped Roussel yourself if I had been silent, I suppose?" inquired I.

"Precisely, Georges, I would not have suffered him



to proceed. But you were so prompt to act that I had no chance. *Nom d'un pipe!* young hot-brain, but you were marvelous ready with your carbine!" laughed Poignet d'Acier.

"I could not hold my hand, Renaud. It set me on fire to see a beautiful maid, such as the one yonder, in the arms of that brute Roussel, with his brandy-burnt face. She is beautiful, isn't she, Renaud?" I said with enthusiasm. "I have heard tell of beings called angels, and I think they must look like yonder girl. Never have I pictured any woman so wonderful as she is!"

Poignet d'Acier smiled at my ardor.

"Very beautiful indeed she is, Georges," he agreed, "but there's a sparkle in that dark eye of hers that indicates she is not *all* angel. I'd not care to provoke her if she had a knife at hand. I wonder what the devil *she* is doing in that wretched mountain hut?"

"Doing?" I echoed. "Why, living there, of course, with her mother and brother. What else should she be doing there?"

"Her *mother* and *brother*? Bah! Georges, where were your eyes?" returned Renaud Bronsard. "Could'st not see that she is of a condition far above that of the old woman and Rocco? *They* are peasants, and peasants I'd know them for if I met them wearing the white cockade and the Cross of St. Louis! But the girl is another sort. She's of the *noblesse*, or I am not first *maître d'armes* of the *chasseurs à cheval* of Damremont!"

"And that means of the Army of Italy, Renaud," worshiped I.

Chatting thus as we rode onward, the afternoon wore away. Twilight was fast falling about us when the road dipped suddenly into a shallow valley, and I saw that we were approaching some sort of an habitation. Through this slender depression in the hills ran the thread of a mountain rill. The road we followed cut the valley from east to west, and was intersected by another that ran north and south along the edge of the stream on the side farthest from us. In the southern angle thus formed, stood a rambling, two-storied structure of battered and weather-worn appearance, stone-walled and thatch-roofed, fashioned after the style of



the Swiss cantons. Evidently the place was a mountain hostelry. Seen through the trees and undergrowth it presented a welcome view to our eyes. We hastened our tired beasts in their walk, splashed through the swift, but fordable, torrent, mounted the slight rise on the other side and drew up before the door. Three persons came from the house to greet us.

Two of these were great young sons of the mountains, huge of stature and strong of limb. The garb they wore, half smuggler, half hunter, set off to advantage their mighty forms and emphasized the muscles of their finely developed limbs. Both had handsome faces, well browned by the winds and rains of the Apennines, and they were unmistakably brothers. Both were fully mustached and bearded, and their dark eyes looked out at us from under the brims of their high-crowned hats with glances far from amicable.

The appearance of the person in the center of the little group contrasted strangely with that of the other two. He was an old man—how old one could not judge, for though on his head, which was bare, a mass of luxuriant hair, white as the Alpine snowbanks, flowed down, framing his face and falling on his shoulders, the countenance shadowed by those thick locks had a complexion clear and healthy as that of a man of thirty, unspotted, smooth and un wrinkled. Not a line crossed his smooth high forehead. His eyebrows were black as the bore of a siege-gun, and the large brown eyes beneath were full of fire and intelligence. His features were handsomely cut, a high, hawk-like nose, strong, composed mouth, full and aggressive chin. He was close-shaven, and the handsome proportions of his powerful throat were plainly shown by the turned-down collar of his shirt.

Though shorter by half a head than the other two, when one had once looked at him, one cared to look at them no longer. For the man seemed a moving tower of strength. Under his short brown jacket and red waistcoat he carried the chest and shoulders of a Milo. It seemed to me that I could see the muscles swelling under his clothes on his long arms as he approached us. His legs, clothed in wide breeches of brown cloth and leathern leggings, were bowed outwards with a marked curve. But they only added to



his impression of power. On his feet were the common nailed shoes used by the people of the mountain country.

The old man's face, as he came up and addressed Sergeant Roussel, was friendly and full of welcome. His eye was mild and benign, his lip wore a gentle and placid smile.

"Be welcome, thrice welcome, illustrious one," he said, bowing low before the sergeant. "Happy the day that brings you and your followers hither. The afternoon is far spent, and you cannot wish to go farther to-night. Alight then, from your horses, and my two good sons here, Pippo and Guisardo, will show you where you may stable them safely. When you have looked to their wants, come to my inn, and there shall you be supplied with all that man can desire for his refreshment. I, Giacomo, who have entertained travelers these forty years here at my house of 'The Falcon's Home' will see to that."

"*Pardieu!* most worthy Signor Giacomo, we'll not be slow to follow your advice," cried Sergeant Roussel. "*En avant*, comrades!" And the sergeant followed after Pippo and Guisardo, while we led our horses behind him.

We found that landlord Giacomo had not been boastful in lauding his stables. They were roomy, well supplied with grain and hay, and clean bedding for the beasts was ready at hand. Cheerily we set to work on the horses, and, spurred on by our own empty stomachs, we soon finished the work of caring for them. Then we made haste to enter the inn, where we found that Giacomo had not lost time in making all things ready for our entertainment.

In the spacious, low-ceilinged public-room on the first floor, a long table, well supplied with all the requisites for a hearty meal, awaited us. Telling off two videttes, one to take post up the road to the east, another to watch at the ford, the sergeant set us an example by seating himself and attacking the nearest dish. We followed suit, and for a time the rattle of knives and crockery, mingled with the noise of working jaws, were the only sounds to be heard.

Giacomo and his sons were indefatigable in urging us to eat, and pressed wine upon us continually. The



old innkeeper besought the sergeant that he would allow him to take refreshments out to the sentinels, and not make them wait for relief. The request was granted.

Supper was nearly finished when two more sturdy young giants entered the room, whom Giacomo presented as his sons Andrea and Ricardo. They carried short rifles which they at once hung up in slings on the walls, where others of like pattern also rested, and hastened to aid their father and brothers in the work of serving us.

Their wine was generous and there was plenty of it, so we drank deep. Songs began to be heard, toasts and stories followed fast on each other's tracks, our hosts apparently enjoying the evening as much as we did.

To what pitch the revelry rose I am not able to say, for supper was scarcely disposed of before I rolled quietly off my bench and lay helpless on the floor. The wine had conquered, and I fell asleep.

How long I lay there I know not, I was stirred to semi-consciousness at last by some one rudely shaking me.

With a grumbling protest I rolled over and strove to continue my nap.

At that a heavily shod foot was emphatically planted in the fleshy part of my back. Half-aroused I rose on my elbow, my eyes blinking unsteadily. They fell under the light for the moment, and then I forced up the lids with an effort and glanced about the room.

The sight that room presented effectually banished all traces of sleep from my brain.

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## CHAPTER VI.

“NOT FOR MY WRONGS—BUT FOR MY COUNTRY!”

IN the strong light shed by several large lamps fixed in iron brackets along the walls every object in the room was plainly to be seen. The old innkeeper and three of his sons stood in a group several paces away from me. The fourth, Guisardo it was, towered above



me, and it was the application of his nailed boot that had roused me from my drunken slumbers.

Between Giacomo and his sons and myself a man was bending over one of a dozen green-clad forms that cumbered the floor, each lying in its separate puddle of glistening crimson. His figure seemed familiar, yet to my throbbing brain it was as that of a person seen and known long, long ago. Strive though I did, I could not rightly place him. I lay rolling my terror-charged eyes about and glaring upon the scene with almost bursting eyeballs, fancying that I must be in the midst of some terrible nightmare. Cold perspiration started out upon my body and bathed my limbs. I made a desperate effort of will to dispel the vision.

The sound of light, quick footsteps approaching from without caused all of the mountaineers to turn toward the open door, save only he whom I have mentioned as remembered but unrecognized. His task, whatever it was, seemed too absorbing for him to heed the coming of an intruder. I myself heard the noise but vaguely, but as I saw the innkeeper and his progeny bend their looks to the entrance I stupidly rolled my own heavy orbs in the same direction.

"Throw something over them ; the sight will shock her ; though 'twas done for her," muttered the innkeeper, as his sons hurriedly tossed over my dead comrades the tablecloth and some near-by rugs.

A woman came eagerly through the door, advanced a few paces into the room and stopped, every line of her face and form distinctly revealed in the brilliant glare of the lamps. The pose of her figure as she stood was magnificent. Her great eyes were flashing with a feverish, glittering luster, a red spot burned on either cheek.

"Look, Lady Aliandra," came to me in the deep voice of the landlord. "We have avenged you. Look !"

The unknown rose and turned toward her. Her eyes, following his gesture, flew to the half-concealed bodies of the murdered *chasseurs*. In one comprehensive, questioning stare she took them all in, and suddenly the horror of the crime appeared to strike her. With a low shriek she covered her face with her hands and shrank back, shuddering in every muscle.



"*Contessa!*" cried Giacomo, moving toward her, but she motioned him away.

"Oh, it is terrible!" she wailed. "I never thought that it would be like *this*."

"Bah! the blood of Frenchmen should be the sweetest sight on earth to you, Aliandra," Rocco retorted. "Especially if your heart is to continue to approve the plans of Count Luca. He loves Italy, the count, and were he here he would wish there were more of them for us to slay."

The girl dropped her hands from her face.

"The two I bade you spare?" she questioned tremblingly, a new light in her eyes. "You have not dared to kill *them*?"

"No, they are safe enough. One I'd have saved on my own account. I liked him," Rocco replied.

"That is well. Were it to do over again I'd spare them all. *Madonna!* I knew not what we did."

And Aliandra shuddered again. Rocco laughed—a laugh low and distinct, a laugh so full of unpitying hatred gratified, so charged with vengeance triumphant, so brimful of keen, diabolical, sated joy, that I gasped, and the cold chill of Fear seemed to freeze my very heartstrings. For now I knew that I was awake. *Mon Dieu!* No man could ever *dream* a laugh like that!

A brutal chuckle from Guisardo answered my panting exclamation.

"Eyes open at last, eh? My little devil of a *sans-culotte*," the wretch cried gleefully. "*San Paulo!* But it was no light work to waken you! Get up on your feet and stand, if you can. It's not politeness to lie like a stupefied hog in the presence of my Lady Aliandra."

With that he bestowed upon me another kick that brought me with an effort to my feet, reeling clumsily against the table, and clutching first for my hilt, which my hand did not grasp, then for my pistols, which were also lacking at my belt.

My action seemed to afford Guisardo unlimited amusement. He threw back his head and roared like the great mountain calf that he was.

"So you'd bite, would you, little reptile!" he jeered. "Your teeth are drawn, but you have the will to do



harm fast enough. Who'd think it, to look at your face of an infant! *Diavolo!*"

"Satan take you!" I contrived to stammer out, for there seemed to be a weight on my tongue and my lips cracked and burned as I moved them. "Filthy cur, I'll kill you for those same kicks!"

"Pray, don't, most illustrious," Guisardo begged mockingly. Stretching out his hands in grinning appeal he grasped my shoulders and whirled me around.

But she whom he had called "my Lady Aliandra" interrupted him. His loud words attracted her attention.

"Cease, Guisardo!" she called imperiously. "Is this the way you interpret my orders? Did I not command that this young trooper and the other one I pointed out should be spared?"

Guisardo took his hands from my collar and pulled clumsily at his forelock.

"I took it to mean only that they were not to be killed, *contessa*," he said sulkily. "I did not suppose you'd care if I kicked this one a *little*."

"Nevertheless keep your great paws off this one, or *you* will know what it is to provoke my anger. Remember that no one in these valleys may do that with safety."

"Excepting Count Luca!" Guisarda muttered with an ugly sneer.

The lady's face burned scarlet and she drew a deep breath.

"Guisardo, son of Giacomo," she said slowly, "have you the wish that I should tell the Count Luca that you have borne yourself insolently in my presence?"

"No, no, *contessa*," Guisardo muttered in a changed and cringing voice. "I would not that you told the count that of me, and I implore you not to think I meant to treat you with small respect."

"Then, if you would regain my good will, aid yonder boy's recovery from the potion of your father. He is still under the influence of the drug, as any one can see. Bring him cold water, that he may drink and dash some upon his head," she commanded.

"Let that be my task, Lady Aliandra," broke in the deep tones of Rocco. "I've have not forgotten that



'twas his hand gave me wine to-day, and he bandaged my head after 'twas broken by his comrades. Curse them! They'll spill no more Italian blood, and they've plundered their last defenseless home!"

"As you please, Rocco," the lady returned. "And now, Giacomo, come forward and remember, you have not done this for my wrongs—but for our country's. Your master shall have golden accounts of you from me when he returns."

"The satisfaction of avenging you, *contessa*, is pay enough for me," the innkeeper said as he walked to her side. "I have lived all my life in the service of your family, and so will I die. When you came to us late this afternoon by the path through the forest, Rocco with you, though he walked with difficulty, and told of the insult offered you by those who lie there, my heart was on fire at once. It is of comfort to know that our deed was pleasing to the Madonna, too. For these sons of Satan, the French, are all of no religion, and to kill them makes one sure of the Holy Mother's favor. My sons and I unquestionably merit Heaven for this night's work."

The effects of the drug still clung to me. During this horrible harangue, I continued to gaze stupidly back at him in a sort of helpless fascination, while my body quivered in every nerve.

"And this one here, *contessa*," he said in tones that were almost beseeching. "What is the use of sparing him? True, you say he defended you from his officer. But no Frenchman has a good motive for anything he does. Therefore—"

He made a nasty gesture with his knife.

"No, no, Giacomo!" cried the girl. "Treat him gently and use him as well as a prisoner can be used."

"But, *contessa*, he is a soldier. Not a very old one, and therefore not hardened or bad yet. Think what he will become after he has served through several campaigns. He will grow proficient in evil very fast, that boy, one can read it in his forehead. If I kill him now he may have some chance of leaving Purgatory for Paradise eventually. So if you wish to show your gratitude, *contessa*, save his soul at the expense of his body," Giacomo argued.

"No, no," muttered the Lady Aliandra. "His blade



was drawn to save me." Then some strange coquetry came into her lovely face, and she whispered: "In a few years, though he may grow wicked, he will also grow very handsome, Giacomo."

At this the ruffian burst into such a horrid guffaw of laughter, that with a face that was red and blushing in the lamplight, the girl hurriedly fled from his mirth, and also from a sight at which, dazed as I was, I could see her shudder every time her eyes caught the heap of dead soldiers on the floor.

The entrance of Rocco, bearing a huge bucket of cold water from the mountain stream, brought the mirth of my tormentor to a close.

"Here, little trooper, drink some of this and don't spare it." Coming up to me he proffered a large goblet he snatched from the table.

I drank greedily, for my throat felt caked and parched to burning. When I could pour down no more water, by Rocco's advice I stripped off my coat and opened my shirt at the throat, lying back on the table while he dashed the icy contents of the bucket over my head and chest.

Presently I was seized with great nausea, to the delight of the landlord and his sons. They screamed and cackled with joy at my frantic gasps for breath, and overwhelmed me with a torrent of vituperative remarks and uncomplimentary names. For fully half an hour I must have struggled, and all that time they crowded around me, each outdoing the others in finding epithets suitable to bestow upon me. At length I was able to stand firm on my feet and resume my coat.

As I did this, my protectress appeared at the door and beckoned me to her.

"You seem quite recovered, young Frenchman," she said, after she had critically looked me over, much as I had seen Captain Mirador view remounts for the squadron.

"I am getting back my wits, *contessa*, as these pigs here call you," I replied. "A few hours will see me in the best of shape, provided your servants don't cut my throat so soon as your back is turned."

"You need not fear that," she began, but I interrupted:



"Pardon, *madame*, you use the wrong word. I am myself now, and whatever I may anticipate, I *fear* nothing."

"You speak bravely, boy," she said with a smile. "Your action to-day was brave, too, and you shall find that I am not ungrateful. I can see that you are looking at me now with detestation, and I do not wonder. But weigh the facts before you judge me. Your fiend of a sergeant laid rude hands upon me, upon *me*, a woman in whose veins runs the noblest blood of these hills! Your comrades abetted him and had no pity for me, You know what I would have had to undergo had not you and your brave friend been there. Confess, then, that they merited the punishment that has met them at the hands of these men, who are all retainers of my family.

"They have shed French blood," I said stubbornly.

"The Republic always avenges her sons, *madame*."

"'Tis *you* who use the wrong word now, *monsieur*," she said in excellent French, making me a sweeping reverence, then faltered: "For I am not married—*yet*." Next her voice becoming haughty, she ordered: "To-morrow we will talk farther, for you please me. Rocco, take him and put him with the *other*."

The hand of Rocco grasped my arm and urged me from her. I turned to look at her face, palely beautiful in the subdued light.

She was gazing at the silent heap on the floor of the room. She was muttering:

"'Twas not for my wrongs but for my country's, you poor wretches died!"

Then suddenly she burst out crying and sobbing as if her heart would break.

Could this woman love Italy as I loved France? Bah! And yet she was beautiful as a Goddess of Liberty.



## CHAPTER VII

## COUNT LUCA—THE PATRIOT

Rocco and one of his fellows led me across the road, and halted me before a low building of stone opposite the inn. A moment later I heard a door swing open and I was pushed forward into the darkness. A key clicked in the lock and the sound of Rocco's retreating footsteps came faintly to my ears. Evidently, I was to be left alone until the morrow.

Determined to occupy the remaining hours of darkness in recruiting my strength by slumber, if possible, I began groping about with the hope of finding a couch of some kind. At the third or fourth step, I stumbled.

"Who comes there?" demanded from the gloom a broken voice, that was not in the least familiar to me, but nevertheless spoke French.

"One of the same nation as yourself, comrade," I answered; "this morning a trooper of *chasseurs à cheval*, now a prisoner to the filthy brigands who own this hole."

Then I heard a great cry, a cry that cannot be written down in words, a mingling of surprise, gratification, imprecation, and thanksgiving. Something rushed at me like a mad thing through the blackness, a pair of sinewy arms were thrown about my body, and I was pressed close to a panting chest. A face wet with tears was rubbed against my cheek. A voice I knew sobbed out:

"Georges! my Georges! Alive and in the flesh!"  
It was Poignet d'Acier.

I returned with fervor the embrace of the *maître-d'armes*, and for a time we stood folded in each other's arms, while the iron-nerved Renaud Bronsard, whom I had never seen greatly moved nor disturbed by anything before then, and whom I had always considered as lacking in the softer emotions possessed by others of my comrades, sobbed and wept like a woman and repeated incessantly:



"Alive! Alive! Georges is alive!"

Of course, I too was not wanting in joy, but being the younger I was the first to regain self-control.

"*Par Dieu!* I'm alive as ever I was, Renaud Bronsard!" I said at length. "Seem'st not to be over-sure of the fact."

"A million times more certain am I than I was a short while since! I thought that they had done with thee as they did with the others, Georges, and that I would never look upon thee again!"

So saying, Poignet d'Acier ceased stifling me and guided me across the room that held us. We sat down, our backs to the wall, and the *maître d'armes* passed his arm over my shoulder.

"Tell me, Georges, how did'st come out of that devil's nest unharmed?" he began.

"'Twas Aliandra saved me, the girl at the farm, the one whom Roussel insulted," I answered. And swiftly I recounted the events I had witnessed upon awakening.

"So *she* was the cause of it then?" he said, when I had finished. "I told thee, Georges, that yonder girl was not peasant born."

"But you, Renaud?" I asked, "did not you see her before you were brought here?"

"No, Georges," he returned. "I saw but the old landlord,—may it be my reward for any good I have done to have him some day before my point!—and his four bloody-minded sons! Rocco and the lady must have waited until the others had made sure work before they entered."

"Did you see them murder the others then?" queried I.

The teeth of Renaud Bronsard ground savagely against each other. I could not see his face, but I heard the sound made by his jaws.

"Before we both die we'll have the satisfaction of requiting the murderers," I breathed into Poignet d'Acier's ear.

"We'll win out of this scrape, together, never fear, Georges," he answered. "And when we next visit the house of Giacomo we'll redden the sky with flame and the earth with blood. We'll learn, too, who this Aliandra may be that they call 'my lady' and cut *chasseurs'* throats for. And we'll pay a visit to her



home, that she may not suppose we have forgotten her."

"*Dame!* she's a woman, Renaud," I remonstrated. "Would'st give her the same treatment you hope to bestow on Giacomo?"

"A woman! *Sang-dieu!* her dam must have been a wolf-bitch of the Apenines!" growled the *maître-d'armes*. "*Sapristi!* She'll have small cause to rejoice that she escaped Roussel to-day if ever she falls into my hands!"

"We're not out of here *yet*, Renaud," I said, to change the trend of the conversation, for I disliked to hear him utter such sentiments. "How do you think we shall get free?"

"We'll have to wait for the dawn to decide on that, Georges. Leave all to me, boy, and be ready to act when I give you the word, that's all. Did the *contessa* give you no hint of what they intend to do with us?"

"She merely said that she'd hold further conversation with me in the morning," I answered.

"Try to find out their plans when you see her, then," advised the *maître-d'armes*. "She may have taken a fancy to that cherub's face of thine, and in that case she'll tell thee all thou want'st to know."

"Poignet d'Acier, you talk as much nonsense as a whole squadron of dragoons could manage among them," I answered impatiently. "Why should you suppose this girl to have a liking for me?"

"Oh, it might chance to be so. One can never make sure of a woman's taste in such matters. I've even known a slim young snap-the-bridle like yourself preferred to a stout swordsman such as I am," he laughed. "And now, sleep if you can, and keep silent at all events. Lay your head here on my chest, Georges, a more willing pillow thou'lt never come across, and good night to thee."

It was no easy matter to fall asleep with that pile of corpses still fresh in my memory; but I managed it at last, and knew no more until the sun had long been up. Then the rough voice of Guisardo, sounding in my ears, awakened me.

"They lie as quietly as the others did; Rocco mio," the wretch was saying.

I opened my eyes. The door was ajar, and from



the aperture, as well as from a narrow loop-hole in the wall on the side next the road, the place was lighted. It was a small, square room, with four walls of rugged stone and a hard floor of beaten earth.

Guisardo was standing near me, and behind him Rocco, who bore a large platter laden with several dishes whose contents smoked and sent forth a grateful fragrance, a bottle and a couple of glasses. Both of the Italians had pistols stuck in their belts, and it was plain that they intended to take no chances of our escaping.

"So you're awake, are you, little devil with the angel face?" grinned Guisardo as he met my eyes. "Rouse up that other son of Satan, and eat what the *contessa* has sent to you. Understand well that it comes from her. Could Father Giacomo and myself have had our way it's little lining you'd get for your lean ribs! Stir yourselves, I say, and don't keep us waiting. Give them their breakfast, Rocco, and pour out their wine for them. You need not be afraid of the flask, 'tis not spiced like the one you had last night."

Rocco placed his burden before us, and we set to work at it with right good will. The food was well-cooked and hot, the wine was excellent, and I for my part blessed the Lady Aliandra for her thought of us. Even the stern heart of Poignet d'Acier softened considerably toward the *contessa*. He confessed as much to me afterward.

When the last morsel had vanished and the flask was empty, the mountaineers, who had stood in silent vigilance beside us all the time we were eating, departed with the platter and we were left alone.

No one came near us, occasional visits to the loop-hole showed us no signs of life stirring about the part of the inn that we could see. The time dragged heavily for both of us. We had pipes and tobacco, but no means of striking a light, as our captors had relieved us of our tinder-boxes. Thus a new hardship was added to our captivity.

Finally we settled down on the floor, saying little and each busy with his own thoughts. Those of Renaud Bronsard were not pleasant, to judge from the manner in which he pulled and twisted his mustache. As for mine, I could not keep them from the Lady



Aliandra. The spell of her wondrous beauty was strong upon me, and despite my recollection of the savage and revolting deeds due to the brutal vengeance by the wretches whom her wrongs had roused to action I could not find it in my heart to hate her.

How could I, with the blood of Pierre David scarce dry on my hand, blame the girl for avenging upon Roussel and the others the terror and disgust their fiendish designs must have caused her?

They fed us again at midday, but we had little heart to eat. When Rocco took away the dishes he told us that the *contessa* would be pleased to visit us in the course of the afternoon.

Barely an hour had elapsed before she came, with him for a body-guard.

I glanced out, the four sons of Giacomo, armed with short rifles were watching the entrance. The Italian beasts would take no chance of our escape.

As she entered that barren cell the girl's beauty seemed to light it up. Not a trace of the emotions of the night before were on her face, every line of her countenance was soft and womanly.

Motioning Rocco to close the door and remain there, she advanced to where we stood.

I bowed my prettiest; and even stern Bronsard saluted grimly as the beautiful creature remarked in a voice that was wondrous sweet to listen to: "I trust that my orders have been carried out, and that you have wanted for nothing?"

"We have been well fed, *mademoiselle*," I answered. "Indeed we have fared better as to stomach comforts than we had done were we with our regiment."

"I wish with all of my heart and soul that you were with your regiment now, and that regiment at home in France, where it should be," she said impulsively. "Ah, why cannot you Frenchmen leave the world in peace! Why must you invade our dear Italy and bring the awful scenes of war among these hills!"

"But, *mademoiselle*," I protested, "we come only in self-defense. You know as well as I do that the foes of the Republic menace her from this quarter. That to beat them we must fight them, and better here than in France."

"But theirs is a just cause," she cried. "They



would crush the anarchy, which you uphold. They would avenge the murder of a king—”

“Who belied his royal blood, *mademoiselle*, and who could not rule,” I interrupted sternly. “The hand of God dethroned Louis Sixteenth, his execution was by decree of Providence.”

“Strange names to hear in the mouth of a French trooper,” she said with a smile, “for your government denies all religion, you know. Do you forget the *fête* of the Goddess of Reason?”

“In that matter, *mademoiselle*, the government and Georges Luc do not agree,” I answered simply, “I know that God rules all things, and I feel that he fights on the side of the Republic.”

“You feel that!” she exclaimed. “You can stand there and—but I forget my place. It is not for *me* to argue with a *sans-culotte*.”

The scorn and contempt in her tone I cannot describe. They were overwhelming.

It enraged me to mark the disdainful emphasis with which she dwelt upon the word “*sans-culotte*”—the title I so dearly loved to apply to myself.

“You are right, *mademoiselle*,” I said angrily, “argument between persons of our respective stations is not profitable. *We* know what to do with aristocrats, at least. It were better for your class had they found out long ago what to do with us.”

“I know *one* who understands,” she remarked significantly, “and he is but too eager to be engaged teaching you manners. You may know him some day, too, though I trust you may never meet. For he loves his country above everything, and his patriotism makes him do deeds that would seem cruel, had they not that excuse.”

“So you hope I and this paragon may not become acquainted, *mademoiselle*?” I smiled. “Why?” Somehow I seemed to hate this aristocrat while she spoke of him.

“Because—because I am grateful to you, and would not have you die. If you fell into his hands, you Republicans could hope for little pity from him. Am I not right, Rocco?”

“Count Luca hates the French,” Rocco replied with a grin.



"And before long they will tremble at his name," Aliandra continued with enthusiasm. "He will show them what it is to invade a nation like Italy."

"You seem quite positive, *mademoiselle*," I remarked in a dry tone.

"I hope for his own sake that he'll not employ such methods as were put in practise last night."

"Ah! I see by your shudder and the way you regard me that you blame me for the fate of your comrades," she said in a quivering, hesitating voice that grew firmer as she proceeded. "Of course I ought to expect as much, but I would not have *you* misunderstand me. Your coming to my aid so promptly yesterday showed me that yours is a chivalrous soul, though doubtless the blood of peasants flows in your veins."

"*Mademoiselle*," I replied in haughty scorn, "though the blood in my body comes not from a strain of nobles, it is blood that has never stooped to slay by a stab in the dark."

She came close up to me, her eyes full of entreaty.

"But you cannot fail to understand me, *Monsieur Luc*," she answered quickly. "You can conceive the feelings roused in my heart when that loathsome sergeant dared to lay rude hands upon *me*."

"But we balked the sergeant of his purpose, *mademoiselle*, and you escaped unharmed," I remonstrated.

"*Unharmed*?" The girl's eyes were blazing. "You call it no harm then that I suffered the polluting touch of that man, and read his vile purpose in his degraded countenance? I, a woman whom no man had ever before dared to treat with disrespect. Boy, you are little more than a child, and you cannot have worn a uniform long, but you are quick of temper and ready of hand to avenge an insult. Giannetta told me after your departure why Rocco dug a grave. How would you feel if God had created you a woman—if he had denied you the right and the strength to maintain your honor with your own hand—how would you feel, I say, if you were treated as I was? Would you sit quietly down and weep, and thank the Madonna that it was no worse? Or would you thirst for the blood of your insulters?"

*Dieu!* how beautiful she was! I can see now her



flashing eyes, her trembling lips, her heaving, panting bosom! A heart of stone must have moved in sympathy for her.

"*Mademoiselle*," I cried impetuously, "you need say no more. So far as you are concerned, the death that ended my comrades is forgotten. Your wrong was your warrant for what you did."

"Thanks, *monsieur*, for your words," she returned, flashing a bewitching smile at me. "And your comrade here? I should be sorry to have him think ill of me."

"What is done, *mademoiselle*, cannot be recalled," Poignet d'Acier said gravely. "It is more to the point, I think, to inquire concerning the disposition you intend to make of ourselves. Do you intend to keep us locked up here for any length of time?"

"Indeed I do not," the Lady Aliandra answered sweetly, "you will have to bear confinement only until this evening. When night has fallen I intend to have you escorted back to the frontier. You are making war against my country, you know, and I must do what I can to lessen the number of our enemies in the field."

"Exactly, I understand your motive, *mademoiselle*," dryly remarked Poignet d'Acier. "I suppose that you will *not* accompany us on our night-march?"

"Why no, of course not," she said, laughing. "I shall bid you farewell here, and return to the cottage of Giannetta, where present circumstances compel me to make my home, though the garb of a peasant seems no great protection to me."

"In that case, *mademoiselle*, if you feel at all in our debt for the trifling service Georges did you yesterday, I will suggest that you discharge it by having a few masses said for our souls by any priest you may happen upon. There are plenty of them in Italy, and though we hold such things of no value since we rid ourselves of our tyrants, still they might help us rest easier in our graves," Renaud observed.

"But why should I have masses said for you, who are still alive?" Aliandra demanded.

"Because our lease of life will be decidedly brief once you leave us," I remarked, conviction in my tone.



“You no doubt intend to place us under the guidance of the landlord and his sons?”

“Yes, that was undoubtedly my purpose,” the lady returned, her eyes wide with astonishment. “In their hands you may be sure of arriving safe—”

“At the frontier of another land than France, *mademoiselle*,” I finished her sentence for her. “We’d not live many moments after your back was turned, believe me.”

“They would not dare to disobey my orders,” she asserted, raising her lovely head and setting firmly her charming mouth.

“As you will, *mademoiselle*,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. “Only, as my comrade suggests, let the masses be said, if ’twill not incommode you to do so.”

She gazed at me, with indecision in her face for a moment.

“You think that they would kill you?” she said at length.

“They’d like nothing more than to have the chance, *mademoiselle*!”

“Then they shall not have it! I will send Rocco with you. *He* will keep them in order, and they will not venture to harm you while he protects you. Do you hear, Rocco? You will accompany the French gentlemen to-night and see that they have no ill at the hands of Giacomo and his sons. Rocco is my foster-brother, Monsieur Luc, and he will never suffer my will to be thwarted. Now, you see you may set your fears at rest.”

“*Mademoiselle*,” I laughed, “the emotion you mention has no place in the make-up of a *chasseur-à-cheval*.”

“Not even in such a youthful one as you are?” she asked, archly. “No, no, do not be angry! I would not have you take offense. Tell me, is there nothing more I can do for your comfort?”

“If you’ll have them give us the means to light our pipes, *contessa*, ’twill be of great service to us,” Poinet d’Acier said somewhat shamefacedly.

“See to it, Rocco, and let some blankets be brought hither. After sundown, I’ll come to give you my farewells.”

The Lady Aliandra took leave of us with a friendly,



though haughty, smile, and I can tell you that she left two admirers in that little stone hut.

"Renaud," I said fervently, "that's a woman!"

"*Dame!* Georges," rejoined the *maître-d'armes*, "dost imagine I thought her a man in petticoats?"

Rocco soon returned with flint and steel and a couple of blankets.

Smoking and chatting, the hours slipped past more rapidly.

The sun was already touching the horizon, if one could judge from the fast waning light in our cell, when Renaud Bronsard suddenly leaped to his feet and stood with his head bent forward, listening intently.

"Hark! Dost hear that, Georges?" he said presently, raising a finger to enjoin my attention. I strained my ears, but nothing rewarded my effort save the murmur of the breeze in the trees of the forest.

"I hear nothing, Renaud," I answered sullenly.

"Hush, boy! Let me listen," he commanded, then whispered:

"Cavalry are coming, advancing along the road from the south! They'll be here within five minutes! *Sacré nom!* In five minutes we'll be free men, Georges! And then, my boy, a rope for friend Giacomo, the same to each of his sons, and a torch to that accursed nest of theirs! *Vive la République!*"

I was wild in a moment. I could hear it myself now. The rattle of hoofs, the banging of the scabbards, the jingle of bits and spurs, all of the unmistakable noises made by cavalry on the march I could distinctly make out.

At the loophole we stood with our cheeks crushed against the rough stones, eager for a first glimpse of our rescuing comrades. We saw Giacomo and the others come out into the road and stand shading their eyes with their hands as they gazed to the southwest.

"Ay, look away, accursed old cutthroat!" I heard Poignet d'Acier mutter. "In short space we'll treat you to a higher spying-place than you have now."

Still the mountaineers seemed to feel no alarm at the approach of the coming troopers. On the contrary they waved their hats and screeched out shrill calls of welcome.



The next moment the part of the road embraced by our contracted vision was full of horsemen, pulling up their stamping steeds in a cloud of dust before the door. They numbered above a score, including two officers. They all rode great black chargers ; and, alas, for our hopes ! they were garbed in the scarlet uniforms and crowned with the leathern, brass-mounted, red horse-tailed helmets of the Sardinian carbineers.

Poignet d'Acier was too astonished and crestfallen to utter a single oath, and for my part I own to a curious sort of chill at the pit of my stomach.

We watched our friend Giacomo sweeping his hat in the dirt before the senior officer as he welcomed him, and then we left the loophole and sat down on our blankets again. Neither one of us said a word. What we wanted to do was to digest our chagrin in quiet.

But that quiet we did not long enjoy. Our door soon creaked on its hinges and we heard Giacomo's oily voice say : "The two that we left alive are here, *illustrissimo*."

"And in there it's black night," rejoined sharp tones that were unknown to us. "Bring torches, some of you, and quickly, too."

Two flaring bits of resinous wood presently gave the desired illumination to our abiding place. The owner of the curt, snappy tongue was not slow to enter and look us over, and we returned him the favor with interest.

Indeed he was not bad to look upon,—a tall, slender, graceful Italian gentleman, with regular classical features, olive skinned and clean shaven. His form was well-proportioned, erect and wiry, and he carried off well his gorgeous uniform of a captain. I took special note of his hands, which were narrow and long, with thin, nervous fingers that worked at times as he spoke.

"Well, *citizens*,—for that's what you all are in France now, I believe," he said, using our language and speaking with an ironical, sneering manner I by no means relished, "Giacomo tells me you and your comrades have been dancing to a pretty tune hereabouts, and that he has been forced to put some restraint on you. I'll take you off his hands, however, but first I want to know whom I have the pleasure to call my prisoners.



You there, the older, give me your own and your comrade's names, rank and regiment."

"Renaud Bronsard, *maître-d'armes*, Georges Luc, private, both *chasseurs-à-cheval* in the regiment Dameremont," promptly replied Poignet d'Acier.

"Good. When and where did you leave your regiment?"

"Yesterday morning, on the Genoa road."

"Good again. Who is in command of the French army?"

"General Bonaparte."

"And of your own corps?"

"General Laharpe."

"Do you know how many men your army numbers?"

"Yes."

"You do? What force has your general?" And the captain bent forward eagerly.

"Five million men."

The captain lost his temper immediately. He spit out a collection of chattering Piedmontese blasphemy.

"Malediction on you!" he cried. "You are a jester, I see. So am I. I'm going to play a merry jest now. Andrea," to a corporal who held one of the torches, "let half a dozen files take their carbines, and straightway send this gentleman to the other world. He's too accomplished for this one."

"Softly, softly," Giacomo interposed, pulling the captain's sleeve. "Remember, *la contessa* would see it, Count Luca. Better to wait."

"*Diavolo!* So she would, Giacomo. Therefore we'll defer the pleasure. Come, we'll get nothing from them, Giacomo, and I am hungry. You needn't mind feeding these gentlemen to-night, their stomachs are too full of pride to carry any further burden."

Away they tramped to their supper. The room was dark again, and I was busy with all sorts of haunting doubts and conjectures.

So this was the Count Luca, the Italian patriot whose praises the Lady Aliandra had vaunted; in what relation did he stand to the lovely contessa? Why should the mere suggestion that she was at hand prevent the execution of Poignet d'Acier? Did he have a lover's solicitude for the beautiful girl's tender nerves?



These thoughts, and many more, chased through my brain in quick succession. Before I had even suggested an answer to one of them I heard my name whispered from the direction of the door.

"Monsieur Luc," came the musical accents of the Lady Aliandra, in a subdued and cautious key, "rise, you and your comrade, and follow me if you care for life."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### TRIC-TRAC THE MOUNTEBANK.

WE hastened to the door. Two dim figures stood in the gloom outside.

The nearest caught my arm as I emerged, saying in a swift whisper: "Hush! As little noise as you can, and all speed. Rocco, guide the other."

A warm little hand was slipped in mine, and I stepped beside the Lady Aliandra, with the blood pulsing and coursing like fire in my veins. *Sapristi!* but the touch of that girl would have roused a flame in an octogenarian!

Some fifty steps we made, and then the shadow of a long low building loomed before us, and I recognized the stables. The lady halted me under shelter of the wall, and Rocco came up presently with Poignet d'Acier.

"I find that it will not be possible for me to have you sent back to France, as I had purposed."

The contessa spoke in plain but guarded accents.

"The soldiers intend to carry you with them when they move at midnight, for they claim you as prisoners of war. Rocco assures me that it is the mind of their officer to have you shot so soon as you are beyond my protection. You stood my friends, and I would prove to you that if my house are quick to avenge injuries, they are slow to forget favors. So you must be off while they are at supper. A sentry is at the crossing of the roads, but Rocco can take you around the inn and guide you by a path that turns into the way to Genoa, about a quarter of a mile to the south. By daylight you ought to meet French troops,



for they were marching on Voltri to-day. At least so the officer in command of the horsemen stated."

"Who is this officer, *mademoiselle*?" I asked curiously. "I shall not forget his features, but I would like to learn his name, if you have no objection to giving it to me."

"He is my cousin, the patriot I spoke of, the Count Luca di Campogiacinto, captain of carbineers, and on the staff of General Colli," she answered proudly. "He is on his way from Ceva to the headquarters of General Beaulieu, and bears despatches. But we must not waste time. Here, I have your saber under my cloak, my young *chasseur*. I picked it out from all the others, as well as your pistols. They are loaded, and Rocco has done as much in the way of weapons for your comrade. Hasten to arm yourself."

I felt ten times stronger when that leathern belt was once more buckled about my waist. Depend upon it, nothing can give a man more comfort than to know he has a well-tryed bit of steel by his side.

"I am ready, *mademoiselle*," I said, caressing the butts of my pistols. "Rocco may start when he pleases."

"Farewell, then, Monsieur Luc," Aliandra whispered, laying her hand again in mine. "The Madonna keep you safe from harm."

I have ever been impulsive, and Poignet d'Acier had told me never to let an opportunity escape. I pressed those divine fingers to my lips, covering them with kisses.

"Not farewell, *mademoiselle*, only *au revoir*," I murmured as I dropped her hand. Until then, know that I love you with all my heart."

I think she laughed. It was too dark for me to see, and what I heard may have been the sound of suppressed weeping. At all events she sprang away into the darkness and left us to the care of Rocco.

The young giant, complying with his lady's directions, guided us silently across the road and around the inn. From the building came the roar of a jovial drinking-song, and it was plain to us that the carbineers were making merry with the good liquor of Landlord Giacomo.

On the eastern side of the house a window was



open, and from the low casement broad rays of light streamed out into the darkness. It was easy for us to crouch along the wall until this dangerous point was passed, and we went safely by.

As we cleared the line of the inn, Rocco muttered in my ear, "The Count Luca is in there. He sups alone. He has given orders that they shall not disturb him for an hour."

I stopped on the instant. Something in the peasant's voice placed a sudden thought in my head. I acted on it at once.

"Rocco," I said quickly, "you have no love for the Count Luca, I will gage."

"Such love I bear him as Satan bears the Sacrament," he answered promptly. "He had me scourged once. I feel the stripes every time I look at his smooth face."

"Then wait here, where we cannot miss you, at the angle of the wall. Poignet d'Acier, I am going back. Come after me, and make no noise."

"What's in your head now, Georges?" Renaud remonstrated angrily, but in a whisper. "To go back! 'tis the height of madness!"

"Not so, my dear Renaud; far from it. Listen to what I say. We've come off from this affair with very little glory. Our comrades are no more, and when we get back to the squadron we'll have a fine tale to tell the chief, won't we? Befooled by a lot of wretched peasantry, eh? Now, I'm not willing to go back in that fashion. The scarlet puppy in yonder room has upon his person despatches, doubtless of importance. Them I intend to carry away with me, or I'll leave my bones to bleach in these mountains!"

"Like my old captain all over, *par la barbe de Saint Pierre!*" swore Renaud Bronsard. "Lead on, Georges, and I'll not fail thee."

Back under the window I crept, pistol in hand. The sill was low, and standing erect, my eyes rose above it. Swiftly I straightened up, caught the wood in a firm grip, and swung myself into the room.

The Count Luca, sitting at a table with his back to the window, while he plied a vigorous knife and fork, wheeled angrily about in his chair. A curse of dismay upon his lips that died away into terror-struck silence



as I thrust the muzzle of my weapon into his face. Doubtless the Italian noble was not wanting in courage. Indeed, I myself was one day to see him fight with a coolness and ferocity that were almost superhuman. But, brave or not, at that moment he turned as pale as paper, and half raised a hand in imploring gesture.

"Don't move!" I whispered sharply, and the menace in my eyes gave force to my words. "You may speak, but if you raise your voice, I'll shoot. Where are your despatches?"

"Who told you I have despatches?" he whispered. "'Tis false, and—"

"Stop lying," I hissed fiercely. "Here, Poignet d'Acier, twist his neck until he can't cry out, and then we'll search him."

The nimble fingers of Renaud Bronsard had a packet of papers out from the prisoner's breast in a twinkling. He likewise felt the Count Luca's body well, making sure that no more documents were concealed in his clothes. With the Count's own belt and the straps of his saber and sabertache we bound him hard and fast, gagging him tightly with a table napkin.

Then we slipped out of the window, found Rocco where we had left him, and hurried away at the best speed we could use with prudence, following the path through the forest mentioned by the Lady Aliandra.

"Did you kill him?" asked the peasant eagerly.

"No, only robbed him!" laughed Bronsard.

"Then, beware of him," remarked the mountaineer.

"Count Luca never forgets."

Rocco knew the country well. Within twenty minutes we reached the spot where the path joined the road to Genoa, and here the peasant lad bade us adieu.

"You must go straight forward now, and I would counsel you not to linger or look behind you," he said in parting. "Our Lady guide you safe! I shall remember you well, you two! You aided Lady Aliandra, and you cheated the Count Luca! *Diavolo!*"

We shook him heartily by the hand, and then we plunged away into the darkness, holding our sheathed sabers in our left hands and running along, shoulder to shoulder, at a dog-trot. We kept the same steady pace, though to men accustomed to make their marches on



horseback it was no easy work. At times one or other would slip or stumble and lurch heavily against his companion. But we panted grimly forward. We dared not relax our speed, for we knew not how soon the pursuit would be hot upon our track. It was a race for life. So we plodded doggedly on.

Suddenly both of us stopped short in our trot and halted together at the same instant. Diagonally forward on our left the blaze of a light among the trees had caught our eyes.

"*Nom du diable!* 'tis a camp-fire! Can there be troops of ours around it?" muttered the *maître d'armes*.

Taking every precaution to avoid betraying our presence, we approached the blaze. It had been lighted in a small open space among the trees, perhaps fifty feet from the road. Soon we were near enough to distinguish two figures seated before it, both busily engaged in eating. Slipping quietly from tree to tree, we gained a position that enabled us to make out every detail in the appearance of these feasters of the forest. And a bizarre and outlandish pair they were!

Picture to yourself a dwarfed, wizened little man past the age of fifty years, alert and lively in every motion he made while satisfying his hunger, a thatch of thick gray hair flowing from beneath a kind of scarlet night-cap, that hung down behind. About his yellow, wrinkled cheeks bristled a gray stubble of beard three or four days old. He had a wide mouth, pointed nose and sharp chin. Under his bushy black eyebrows glanced a pair of restless, red-lidded gray eyes. The upper part of his body was covered by a tawny-colored coat, the cloth shaggy and coarse in texture. On his legs, which he had crossed under him like a Turk, he wore an old pair of military trousers and leggings of leather, like those of the mountaineers. Add a pair of stout shoes, the soles well garnished with nails, and you will have a fair idea of the person who sat in the firelight nearest to our point of view.

But if I say that the man was strange to look upon, what adjective can be used to describe his companion? For the second banqueter was a monstrous, hairy ape, huge of bulk, long armed, fully six feet high when he stood erect, with a muzzle and face of bright azure hue, lined with stripes of black and orange. A dingy,



faded forage-cap, bearing a tarnished band of gold lace, was held upon his head by the chin-strap, passed beneath his jaws, and it had fallen rakishly over the right eye. For the rest, his body was thickly protected by short brown hair, rubbed away in places showing the pink skin. A broad, nearly healed, gash from some sharp instrument seamed his left hind-quarter. As the beast picked and selected certain choice bits of food with his great black hands, one could plainly see that beneath his hide lay muscles of prodigious power.

While we stared at them, the man finished his meal, produced a short, black pipe, filled it and began to smoke. Blowing two thin clouds from his nostrils, he addressed the monkey in a thin, squeaky voice that would have sounded a fitting accompaniment to a shrill penny-whistle at a village fair.

“Confess, Agricola, my only friend in the world, that the present condition of our affairs might be worse. Last night we were straining every nerve and using all the wit Nature has bestowed upon me to evade those white-coated beer-swillers, the Kaiserlicks. There was for us the pleasing certainty of taking a dance upon nothing at the end of a rope, if the soldiers of the Emperor Francis managed to lay hands upon us. During the hours of daylight we have crept and crawled along in the forest; now we are past the den of that old thief Giacomo, we may enjoy a fire and be warm again. In the course of a couple of hours we’ll be famously rested. And then *en avant*, to Voltri, where we’ll be once more under the tricolor. Rejoice with me, then, Agricola, for our perils are nearly over.”

To the little man’s speech the ape made no reply, of course. But he was not to go unanswered. Both Poignet d’Acier and myself were rejoiced to hear once more the good speech of France, and the words had been uttered in the tongue of our country.

“*Par Dieu !* A Frenchman ! Hola ! comrade, can you make room at your fire and board for a couple of countrymen ?” cried the *maître d’armes*.

As he spoke we left our sheltering tree-trunks and stepped out into the firelight.

The little man rose as if set on springs, and seized



with his left hand a stout club, his right being at the same time thrust into his bosom. The ape rumbling out a menacing growl, ranged himself at his side.

"*Qui va là ?*" our friend of the fire demanded. "Come no nearer, I warn you, before I am content that you are friends. Agricola and I are perfect devils for fighting, once we begin!"

"I don't doubt it, comrade, and I'll not put your words to the proof," laughed Poignet d'Acier. "We two are *chasseurs* of Damremont, and you should know our uniform. Lay down your club and tell your friend that we are compatriots. Then give us some of the food you have there, for we have fasted since mid-day."

The little man at once threw his hostile attitude, and after a glance at our green jackets gave us a hearty welcome. He asked our names; and when he learned that of Poignet d'Acier, cried out that it was well known to him.

"I have heard much talk of you, and I bless the day that honors me with the acquaintance of the first swordsman in the army," he declared. "My name has perchance never reached your ears, for I am but a homeless, friendless vagabond at the best, with no one to care for me save my ape, Agricola. Yet there are some who wear French uniforms, and of no mean rank at that, who have good cause to be glad that they know Tric-trac the mountebank."

The food in Tric-trac's wallet was not such as one would subsist on if one had a choice. Hungry men are not apt to be fastidious, and we were unmistakably hungry men. So we ate with a relish, and the juggler became more beaming with every mouthful we took.

As he ate, Renaud Bronsard told of our adventures. At the name of Count Luca, I noticed the mountebank's eyes shine with a strange light, and he became more attentive, if possible, than before, when the despatches were mentioned.

"Where are they?" he cried, abruptly breaking into the *maître d'armes'* recital. "Have you examined them, those same despatches?"

I thought the man had gone mad, his manner was so excited. But Poignet d'Acier answered calmly:



"We have not yet had an opportunity. The papers are safe enough, however, are they not, Georges?"

"Let me see them," Tric-trac begged eagerly. "Though we have scant time to spare, I implore you let me cast an eye over their contents."

"Well, old fellow, you've been a cordial host to us, and I don't know that 'twould do any harm if you read the Austrian-general's letters. It must be while I hold them, though, and, be warned in advance, that if you make any suspicious movements or attempt to touch them, Georges there will treat your carcase to a pistol ball," the *maître d'armes* concluded with a curt nod at me.

The documents were produced and the two bent over them, while I sat and watched them, ready to fulfil Poignet d'Acier's menace in case need arose. The mountebank read no farther than halfway down the first page. Then, with a quick oath, he leaped to his feet.

"*Mordieu!*" he cried, "I have seen enough. Put up the papers, Citizen Poignet d'Acier, and guard them as you would your life. Instead of going to Voltri, you must come with me to Savona. Bonaparte is there, and when you place what you've gained in his hands, you'll do the Republic great service. As soon as Count Luca is free, every man and horse he can command will be hot on the track. Come, aid me to extinguish the fire and then we'll be off. Hasten, I say, every instant adds to our peril."

We rose, and started to smother the blaze. Hardly had we made a good beginning when Tric-trac paused and held up his hand.

"Listen!" he commanded.

From the forest road to the north there came to us upon the breeze of the evening the sound of the hoofs of horses, urged to a headlong speed. It swept rapidly nearer.

"*Sacré nom!*" the mountebank whispered, "they're upon us already."

A loud shout, then a chorus of cries told us that the fire was discovered.

"We won't run this time, Georges," the *maître d'armes* said, looking at me with a smile, that for all its grimness, had in it something wistful and tender.



"'Tis hard for thee to die so young. But what remains to us but that? Thou'd'st not wish to surrender, my boy?"

"Never, Renaud, *à la mort!*" I returned, while I seized a pistol in either hand.

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## CHAPTER IX.

"WHY CRAWL WHEN ONE CAN RIDE?"

"FOOLS!" Tric-trac cried impatiently.

From the road we heard the plunging and snorting of steeds checked while in full career, the rattle and clash of the carbineers flinging themselves from their saddles to the ground.

The mountebank tore the coat from his back and flung it over the half extinguished fire. For the instant we were shrouded in darkness.

"Quick!" he gasped.

With his left hand he seized me by the shoulder, his right performing the same service for Poignet d'Acier, and rapidly he urged us into the bushes, heading *north*. One shrill whistle he uttered as a signal to his ape, whom I could hear leaping alongside.

Some fifty steps we crushed through the underbrush, and then Tric-trac ordered in a sharp but low tone,

"Down upon your bellies in all haste. The noise they make themselves must have covered our flight, but from here it is safer to creep."

We obeyed without demur. As I sank to the earth I cast a hasty glance back over my shoulder. The fire was beginning to flare up again, and guided by the increasing blaze the Sardinian troopers were crashing toward the spot where they expected to find the objects of their pursuit.

"On, on," Tric-trac reiterated, "quietly, but as swiftly as you can."

With all care we began to creep *northward*, guided every second by the clear whispers of the juggler. It is not a pleasant way of traveling, this all-fours formation. *Sacré!* how the little rocks and stones hurt one's knees!



A furious yell of disappointment echoing through the trees made us aware that our enemies had reached the fire to find us nowhere visible. Amid the storm of shouts and curses there sounded one calm voice, implacable and imperious, "Right and left!" it cried promptly. "Spread out both ways and after them. They can't be far away, and we'll have them yet!"

"*Will you?*" the mountebank breathed to the black night behind us. "Search on, Count Luca, and search in *that* direction as long as you please. You have to do with Tric-trac, my gentleman, and he'll cheat you."

The carbineers wasted no time in obeying the orders of their captain. Into the forest they plunged, running against the trees, stumbling over fallen branches and bushes, bruising their shins upon great rocks in their reckless hurry. They called to each other continually, and their cries, we noticed, worked slowly *southward*. One fellow must have mistaken some bush or tree trunk for ourselves in the darkness, for presently a carbine roared, and then came a sputtering volley of pistol shots, accompanied by a rush of the Italians toward the spot where they heard the first report.

The curses of Count Luca at their stupidity quickly drove them back to their task of beating the woods.

Meanwhile we still crawled and crept. I know not how far we had gone, for to judge distance covered in this manner is exceedingly difficult, when all at once I felt that our way lay down-hill.

"There's a descent here, Tric-trac," I whispered.

"*A la bonne heure!* citizen Sans-barbe," he answered joyously. "'Twas for this place that I was heading. A gully it is, some eight or ten feet deep, with a path at the bottom. We can walk there without fear of being discovered if they light torches. And the sound of our footsteps they'll not be near enough to hear."

It was a great relief to stand erect once more. Safe upon the path at the end of the descent I drew a long breath of satisfaction. To walk is a poor enough manner of making one's way in this world. But to crawl! what a mode of journeying for a *chasseur-à-cheval*!

"Now, citizens, you must stir your legs! Along this path we must travel eastward for mayhap a good half mile. Then we'll make a detour and come back



to a road that leads direct to Savona, a little to the north and westward of where we are now. You'll have a long tramp, but I'll guarantee that you arrive safe. I know every foot of these mountains," the mountebank chuckled.

"But if your road to Savona lies north and west of our present position, why go east, friend Tric-trac?" I objected.

"*Sapristi!* you are young, citizen Sans-barbe, but I didn't think you such a fool as to ask that question. Can't you see that if we go north *at once* the carbineers will be apt to pursue us? For they will turn back very soon now to search in this direction. To gain the way I spoke of we'd have to take the road or else creep for the better part of the night. You're not in the humor for that, are you?"

No, decidedly I was not, yet I relished almost as little the idea of a long walk that I deemed might be avoided. "I believe we could go by the road," I said stubbornly. "They won't win their way back through the brush for a good half hour. And by that time we can be far advanced."

"No, no, *dame!* I tell you that I won't take the risk," the juggler rejoined. "On foot the road is too dangerous. Had we horses, now, it might be done."

"*Parbleu!* I've carried my point then," I coolly answered. "Follow me and in ten minutes I'll supply you with the requisite beasts."

"But from where?" he demanded, and I could fancy his stare of astonishment, though I could not see his face.

"From the mounts of Count Luca and his men over there. He can't have left more than two troopers to watch them. Even if there are four we'll agree to take care of that many, eh, Poignet d'Acier!"

Tric-trac did not speak for some seconds.

Then he said with his voice full of admiration, "I am glad that I have met you. If you escape being shot by the enemy or hanged by the provost-marshal, some day you'll be a general-of-division. Lead on and we'll have the brutes in no time."

"Nay," I laughed, "as for the guiding, *you* must do that. Bring us to the road, and then leave the rest to us."



"*En avant*, then," he returned. And cautiously we moved along the path, our faces turned to the west.

Warned by Tric-trac we left the gully ere we reached its end, crawled up the bank and with little noise made our way to the road.

The ape had kept pace with us in all our movements and appeared to comprehend some strange grunting noises his master had made at times for his benefit. Of all four of us he was the quietest, not even uttering a whimper.

Onward we stole until we could distinguish the breathing, the occasional stamp or snort of a restless steed among the dark mass of horses that lined the road at the spot where the carbineers had dismounted. The beasts were not tied, for they were especially trained for work among the mountains—hunting banditti and the like—and each was schooled to stand quiet when his master left his back.

I had guessed rightly. Count Luca had ordered two of his followers to remain and watch the steeds of the rest. The sky had grown somewhat lighter, and against it we could make out their dim forms as they sat their horses in the middle of the road, talking together in low tones.

Foot by foot we came nearer to them, invisible against the black wall of the forest.

"Hark! they are coming back," one of the Italians said suddenly, just as the *maitre d'armes* pressed my arm and my hand; obedient to his signal, I grasped the hilt of my saber.

"From their tone they've met with no success," rejoined his comrade. "*Cospetto!* but we'll have a hearty laugh at their expense, Orsino mio! To let the Frenchmen fool them thus!"

"*Diavolo!* how we'll plague them," the other laughed back.

Man is apt to be shortsighted. The contemplated taunts and jeers of those two particular Sardinian troopers were never to be spoken.

"Now, Georges!" Poignet d'Acier cried sharply. We were upon them with the leap of a pair of merciless, blood-desiring panthers. Our attack took them completely by surprise and they made no effectual resistance.



One of them, the man whom I struck down, let out a piercing scream and tried to rise after he crashed upon the roadway. A second thrust quieted him forever. His fellow-carbineer never made a sound, but fell dead from his saddle at once under the terrible blade of the *maître d'armes*.

The cry of my victim was answered on the instant by the voices of those whom Count Luca was leading back. From the noises that reached our ears they had started to run toward us.

"To horse," Renaud Bronsard commanded. "Take the beasts that have stood, these two can scarce be so fresh."

We mounted in haste, to my astonishment the ape climbing with agile speed to the saddle of a great charger. Tric-trac leaped his steed to my side and grasped my rein.

"We two will go first," he cried. "Do you but keep your seat, Citizen Sans-barbe, and I will care for the steering. Let the ape do the same for you, *maître d'armes*, give him your bridle. He has traveled thus before and will follow me close. All ready?"

"All ready," Renaud Bronsard replied.

"Away then," called out Tric-trac, and furiously we dashed northward at the top of our speed. They were good horses, those black chargers of the Sard-cavalry. Heavier and bigger of bone than those we rode in the regiment Damremont, likewise better fed and cared for than our unlucky bays had been of late. In noble fashion they stretched to their work as we hammered their flanks with our unarmed heels—for we had thrown away our spurs when we left the inn, they hindered us in running. Cries of rage from the place where lay the bodies of the unfortunate carbineers we heard before we were out of earshot. Almost immediately in our track arose the crash of pursuing cavalry.

"They're after us, Georges!" cried the voice of Renaud Bronsard.

"Let them come, were they a thousand," I shouted back, carried away by my excitement. "*Sangdieu!* Renaud, but this is glorious!"

For the moment I was mad, afire with exultation at the success of my plan and thrilling with the delightful sense of *movement*. The great, quivering, straining



body between my knees seemed to send a portion of its mighty strength into my own frame, my horse and I seemed welded into the same creature, endowed with a power and energy that nothing could affright, no odds could daunt. But O how that ape rode! Wild snorts of fear and rage came from the charger to which his great limbs clung. Every now and then there re-echoed through the forest a rib roasting thump followed by a neigh of terror as Agricola brought down a mighty blow of his great paw upon his mount to urge it to frenzy and to speed.

Onward we hurtled, piercing the wall of the night with bound on bound, the wind in my teeth, its whistle in my ears, the gloom and the murk all about us. *Dame!* but it is to *live*, to ride such a ride.

That the juggler knew every foot of the country was no idle boast on his part. Though one could see not an inch before his nose in the darkness, he found his path as by instinct. Of a sudden he whirled our leaping steeds into a road that ran at right angles to the course we had pursued, and along it we tore at the same reckless pace.

Those who followed after were not to be shaken off thus. That they knew of the existence of our new line of flight was evident, for they halted ere they passed it to listen for the sound of our horses' hoofs. Their doubts satisfied, again they took up the chase, riding as hard and daringly as ourselves. 'Twas a bold horseman who would venture to urge his mount over that broken, rocky ground with no apparent care for neck and limb! Yet Tric-trac dared it, guiding his horse and my own with hands firm and unerring.

The Italians behind us were less successful. Three several times we heard the sickening crash of horse and rider rolling among the rocks. The shriek of anguish one poor devil gave would at any other time have moved my heart to pity; but I was not myself in the wild exhilaration of the moment. I turned half round in the saddle and sent back a frantic shout:

“ *Vive la République!* ”

They fired pistols and carbines at that, but they could get no aim and the balls went wild in the darkness. Still they would not give it up. Count Luca



untiringly led the chase, his voice encouraging the carbineers to continue their efforts to overtake us.

With any other than Tric-trac to direct our course we had been lost men. Correctly and without fault he pointed the way, over the rocks, down sudden declivities, up steep ascents, along level stretches of stony roadway, reining our beasts like one moved by some supernatural spirit.

Though the troopers clung to us to the last and would not be shaken off, the loud challenge of the extreme outpost of the French beyond Savona brought them to a halt at length. As we passed the sentry we heard them ride slowly away into the night.

Much to our surprise the vidette proved to be a member of our own squadron, and we learned that the regiment had left the march of the division Laharpe and had joined the center of the army that day. When the corporal, had conducted us to the main guard, Poignet d'Acier immediately approached Lieutenant Doumerc, who was in command, demanding to be taken at once to headquarters.

The lieutenant made some difficulty, but the *maître-d'armes* insisted so strenuously that we must see the Commander-in-Chief, that at last the officer gave in. He called for his horse, and ordering us to follow set out for that part of the encampment where General Bonaparte was to be found.

It was no "tented field" that bivouac of the troops about Savona. The old practise of carrying canvas dwellings to war our chief had discarded. The men of his armies lay ever beneath the open sky when engaged in those campaigns his genius made immortal. Only officers of the higher ranks were allowed tents, indispensable to them in the performance of their duties.

Among the smoldering camp-fires and past the guards of sleeping regiments the lieutenant preceded us to where a *marquée* had been pitched, its white walls plainly to be seen in the light of several great blazes that were constantly fed with fuel by attendant soldiers. A dozen yards from the circle of firelight we were brought to a stand by the "*Qui va là ?*" of a vigilant sentinel, and it needed some sharp colloquy and persuasive power on the part of our officer to be allowed to make his way farther.



Eventually he triumphed, and bidding us await his orders he advanced toward one of the fires.

Looking beyond his figure I could see the shape of a single man standing before the blaze, his hands behind his back, his head, half-shadowed by his plumed cocked-hat, sunk on his chest, his legs wide apart, the saber trailing on the ground behind them. Several other officers sat upon the earth some yards away, smoking and chatting among themselves, but none venturing to interrupt the musings of that solitary form.

The lieutenant went straight up to him, saluted, and appeared to utter a number of words that we could not hear. Then he saluted once more, his speech apparently finished.

A voice so penetrating that every syllable was clear to me made answer.

“Despatches captured, you say? And of the highest importance? Give them here.”

Again by his movements Lieutenant Doumerc was seen to be talking.

“*Diantre!* will you never have done?” that cutting tone broke in before he had ended. Order them forward at once, then, and let me get to the heart of this affair.”

The lieutenant turned his face to where we stood, and called: “Troopers Poignet d’Acier and Sansbarbe, advance.”

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## CHAPTER X

### GENERAL BONAPARTE

WITH brisk steps we came up to where they stood awaiting us. The officer at the lieutenant’s side barely acknowledged our salutes.

“The papers,” he demanded curtly, holding out his hand.

“Here, *mon général!*” Renaud Bronsard said, drawing them from his breast and extending them to the officer’s grasp. He snatched them unceremoniously.

“The seal of this one is broken. How came it so?”



he asked at once, his eyes bent upon the composed face of my comrade.

"I wished to know what we had captured, *mon général*. Therefore I examined the first despatch," the *maître-d'armes* said quietly.

"Forget whatever you learned from it! An order, do you hear!" and he opened the paper.

"I am no babbler, *mon général*," Poignet d'Acier began, but the man addressed silenced him by an impatient gesture, bending all his attention upon the document in his hands.

As he read I took in every detail of his face and figure.

He was a little man, below the middle height, and his body, beneath the long-skirted, gold-embroidered blue coat girt about his waist by the broad tri-colored sash that marked him a general of the Republic and the white breeches and the top-boots that ended some inches below his knees, was thin and meager. The features of his countenance were almost beautiful in their classical regularity, the high nose and the firm, Cæsar-like lips were admirably cut. Yet the whole face was haggard and emaciated, pallid as if from loss of sleep or a sense of overwhelming responsibility. It conveyed to me the impression that somewhere in this man there lay a craving, insatiable hunger for something he had not yet attained, an absorbing, unappeasable desire for prizes he perhaps already saw within his reach. As to age he was about twenty-six.

He was not one to hesitate at any means to attain his ends, I mentally decided as I stared curiously at him.

Just then he finished the first letter, glanced quickly up, and I lowered my eyes in confusion before the piercing gaze of a pair of orbs the hardest to face that I have ever known. They were handsome, and yet they were terrible, those gray, far-seeing eyes of Napoleon Bonaparte. They flashed into mine in that brief second with a light as cold and hard as steel. I felt the blood burn my cheeks and neck. Though not as a rule wanting in *sang froid*, I was abashed.

So I kept my glances bent upon the earth, while he read the remaining letters, which, indeed, he accomplished in very short space. Hearing him mutter a low



exclamation under his breath, I ventured to look at him as he was folding up the last one.

He did not heed me this time, and he appeared to stare beyond me into the darkness to the east. His lips puckered and he commenced to whistle. I knew the air well. "*Malbrouck*" it was, a piece of music that came to be prophetic when hummed by him to those who studied his moods in after times.

Abruptly he ceased his whistling, turning toward the group of seated officers.

"Berthier," he cried, "come here!"

One of them rose and sprang to his side with respectful obedience.

"Read!" Bonaparte commanded, handing him the despatches.

While his order was being obeyed, he leaned upon the shoulder of the Chief-of-Staff, following the lines also with his own eyes. At a certain point he extended his finger and drew it across the face of the paper with a gesture at once exultant and pitiless.

"Do you see?" he asked in a voice that came from between his lips in a sort of hissing rush. "Do you mark that? *They are mine, now, par Dieu! the whole might of Austria could not save them!*"

"If they be not false," the suave tone of General Berthier objected.

"False! They cannot be so," the Corsican cried impetuously.

"But if it should be a snare," his more cautious subordinate suggested.

"I'll soon satisfy your mind on that point. *Hola! chasseur*, where got you these despatches?" the General of the Army demanded, facing Poignet d'Acier.

"From a captain of Sardinian cavalry, *mon général*, who is aide to General Colli. He was on his way to Beaulieu's headquarters. You see, our squadron marched from Albenga on—"

"Never mind that. Simply answer my questions. You *know* he was of Colli's staff?"

"*She* said so, at least, *mon général*," Renaud Bronsard answered in uncertain accents.

"She? Whom?" demanded Bonaparte.

"The girl Roussel insulted. When she bade Rocco guide us to—"



*Ciel!* how the Commander-in-Chief's eyes flashed.

"Imbecile!" he cried in a rage, "do you suppose I comprehend your talk of Roussel and Rocco? Here, you other, were you companion to this great wooden-head?"

"I had that honor, *mon général*," I managed to answer.

"Then try if you can tell me what I wish to know. Speak up and be brief."

Rapidly and concisely as lay in my power, I recounted the main facts of our expedition. When I reached the arrival of Count Luca at the inn Bonaparte checked me.

"Chut! that is enough. I have heard of that gentleman before," he said. "You got the letters from him?"

"From him, *mon général*," I replied.

"Then, there's no doubt to as their veracity. Colli trusts him much, this same Count Campogiacinto. *Maître d'armes*, 'tis scarce worth the while to speak to you of promotion. You stand at the head of your profession. My aide, Junot, will bring you a purse in the morning, and you may drink as many healths to the Republic as you like."

"But, Georges, what's to be done for Georges?" Poignet d'Acier demanded bluntly.

"Who is Georges? Do you mean your young companion?" Bonaparte asked with a slight frown.

"Ay, that I do. Are you not going to promote him, Citizen general?"

"But why? What has he done, save bear you company and share your luck in escaping?"

"Done? *Parbleu!* had it not been for him you'd not possess the information you value so highly." And, before the general could stop him, Renaud Bronsard blurted out all the facts concerning the seizure of Count Luca.

"There, that's what he has done, Citizen general," he wound up triumphantly.

Bonaparte fixed a steady glance upon my face, until my eyes once more sank before the power of his.

"He names you Georges, yet I think your officer called you 'Sans-barbe,'" he said slowly. "Is that your appellation?"



"They give me that for a *petit nom* in the squadron, Citizen general," I responded. "I call myself Georges Luc."

"Your pardon, Citizen general," the *maître d'armes* broke in. Approaching Bonaparte he spoke to him in a whisper for some moments. Then he fell back and saluted.

Bonaparte seemed amazed and demanded, "Is what you say true, *maître d'armes* ? 'Tis a curious fact if it be so."

"True as the Republic, *mon général*," Poignet d'Acier averred earnestly.

Keenly the Corsican eyed me for a few seconds more. Then,

"Private Georges Luc," he said, "you love the Republic?"

"With all my heart, Citizen general."

"You will fight for her?"

"I have no dearer wish than to shed my blood in her cause."

"You hate the aristocrats?"

"To the guillotine with them all! Long live the *sans-culottes*!" I cried with enthusiasm.

General Bonaparte laughed heartily.

"See that you never recede from such noble sentiments," he said in a dry, ironical way. "As reward for your presence of mind in remembering the despatches, I make you corporal. See to it, lieutenant, when you make your morning report," addressing Doumerc. "Away with you now. Come, Berthier, to work at once!"

The Chief-of-Staff and the Head-of-the-Army had finished with us. So we saluted and made our way back to where our horses were standing. They carried us patiently to the watch-fire where Tric-trac and the ape Agricola had stopped.

Here we were presently busy recounting our adventures to a score of comrades eager to know what had befallen the remainder of Sergeant Roussel's squad.

When we had finished it is safe to say that we had about us as wrathful a band of *sabreurs* as could be found at that moment in Europe. They were not silent in their anger, either. They could swear, the men who wore the green of the regiment Damremont,



and I fear that the Recording Angel was weary that night.

The first flush of rage over, interest was transferred to the curious companions we had picked up in the woods.

"*Sein de la Vierge!* They haven't returned empty-handed, at all events," growled old Nicolas Mauran, who had been in the regiment longer than any one could recall. "What sort of a traveling menagerie is this that thou hast picked up, *maître d'armes*?"

"Did merit meet with its just reward in this unfeeling world it had doubtless been my happy lot to come to your famous regiment, accompanied by a collection of strange beasts, such as has never met your eyes," cried Tric-trac bowing profoundly. "Fate has decreed that I arrive with but one companion, and him I take great pride in presenting to you. Citizens, my ape, Agricola. Agricola," throwing to the monkey the club I have before mentioned, a heavy bit of smooth, polished wood, perhaps four feet long, which the ape caught with great dexterity, "we are among soldiers, my friend, and moreover, they are of the cavalry. Salute, then, and according to the custom of their branch of the service."

Immediately Agricola, grasping the stick by its heavier end, performed with it the saber salute, making the air hum as he brought down his weapon. He then, taking the word from his master, assumed the different positions of attack and defense, going through the various cuts, parries, and lunges with an agility that showed him to be thoroughly well trained.

The delight of all who beheld was unbounded. Poignet d'Acier wanted to embrace Agricola on the spot, and for my own part I thought I had never seen anything to compare with this talented monkey. Using his stick as a gun he executed the infantry manual of arms without a mistake. When his master asked him how he would honor the flag of the Republic, he doffed his forage cap and waved it thrice about his head. At mention of the standards of Austria, England, Prussia and Russia, his response was to pull his headgear more firmly down over his eye, chattering angrily as he did so.

Agricola's accomplishments exhausted, Tric-trac took his turn at astonishing us. He was a wonderful



man, that Tric-trac ! He blew fire from his mouth and nose ; he swallowed a saber ; he took half a dozen keen little knives from under his coat somewhere ; let us feel their edges, and began throwing them into the air and catching them, keeping them all moving constantly, and never once cutting himself, or dropping a knife. He drew a handful of silver coins out of Pierre Santron's nose. He found a dozen colored balls in my shako, where I had never suspected their presence. And he kept them, too, which seemed to me not quite fair on his part. He showed us many more feats of legerdemain that I cannot recall just now. Oh ! he was a wonderful man !

"You spoke of Giacomo to your ape just before we made known our presence near your fire, if I mistake not," I said to him. "Evidently you've had some dealings with the landlord of yon mountain inn?"

"Yes, I have met him," Tric-trac said in a dry tone. "So has Agricola. Do you see that trifling scratch on his leg? Well, Citizen Sans-barbe, that's a little memento of Giacomo, a souvenir of the fact that he objected to my performance in an inn-yard at Placentia, on the ground that he was not in the humor for witnessing such foolery. I did not desist, and he threw me out into the street. He is strong as an ox, Giacomo. Agricola sought to avenge my injury, and would have done so, too, but the devil of a mountaineer got his knife out and cut the ape as you see. So you see Agricola remembers Giacomo. I know him also. Indeed I've known him for a long time, having frequently rested at his inn when passing through the mountains. This is not the first, no nor the twentieth time I've crossed the frontier."

"Then you know the Count Campogiacinto?" I asked.

"Yes, and it's little good I know of him also," answered the mountebank. "Have a care how you trust yourself in his clutches after to-night, my young friend. A long arm and a vengeful temper has the Count Luca ! *Diable !* he'll never forgive you for carrying away his papers !"

"And—the—Lady Aliandra?" I suggested, my face growing red under the blaze of the camp-fire.

"*Diable !* yes," laughed the juggler. "By your blush-



ing face I can give a shrewd guess at one of the shapes that will visit your slumbers to-night. Black eyes and ruby lips she has, and the form of a goddess, eh?"

"What do you mean?" I asked sharply.

"Nay, never be angry, lad. I mean no harm. Dream of her, aye, and love her, Sans-barbe, for she is worth it though prouder than a peacock. But what have you and I to do with the greatest heiress in northern Italy?" and he began to laugh again.

Not liking the mountebank's merriment, I surlily went to sleep.

The sound of the bugles awoke us all too soon, but our eyes once fairly opened we had plenty to occupy us.

The squadron had been under fire on the preceding day, and in consequence there were four spare horses. Of these we had our choice. Mine was a vicious, rat-tailed skeleton of a beast, formerly ridden by Jules Vallon, who had run against a shot from the Austrian cannon on the day before. According to the craze then prevalent in France for making use of the names of antiquity, my new charger rejoiced in the title of Cassius. Despite his uncertain temper and plainly displayed ribs, Cassius had one great virtue. He could outrun and outlast any horse in the regiment. And glad was I to get him.

During the whole of that day the troops were held ready to march, for the Austrians were advancing, Beaulieu, from Genoa, against Laharpe; D'Argenteau, upon Montenotte, where Rampon, with twelve hundred men, maintained the redoubt of Montelegino against him and could not be conquered.

Warned by Luca's despatches of the Austrians' intention to fall upon him at Savona, Bonaparte put his forces in motion that night, marching upon Montenotte.

On the 23d Germinal (April 12th) our leader began that series of dazzling victories that made his name immortal, by crushing D'Argenteau at Montenotte. The successes of Millesimo and Dego followed on the 24th and 25th.

The Austrians and Sardinians being separated by his brilliant maneuvers, Bonaparte held the former in check while he scattered the latter to fragments at



Ceva, Mondovi, and Cherasco. On the 9th of Floreal the King of Sardinia concluded an armistice with the Republic.

The Piedmontese disposed of, the Army of Italy again was directed against the soldiers of the Emperor Francis. Beaulieu thought to hold the river Po against us, but Bonaparte, feigning to cross at Valenza, beguiled his veteran adversary to await us there, while by a flank march he arrived at Placentia. Here Lannes, who had won his rank of colonel upon the bloody field of Millesimo, forced the passage on the morning of the 18th Floreal.

At Fombio the Austrian division of Liptai strove to hold our advance, but they could not stay us, though the army suffered a serious loss in the death of General Laharpe.

The Po was crossed and the way to Milan was open.

Again and again had the Directorate decreed that "the Army of Italy had deserved well of their country."

But, alas! while every day brought fresh laurels to the other branches of the service, to us of the cavalry they passed ingloriously enough. In the rough, hilly country, troopers could not be employed advantageously. Besides they feared to oppose us to the superb horsemen of Austria. In winning our way from out the mountains we felt that we had no share. The gates of that golden treasure-house had been forced by the indomitable courage of the ragged troops of the infantry.

Yet we hoped always for better days, and heartily we joined in the cry of: "*To Milan!*"

On the plains of Lombardy we cavalry *could act!*



## BOOK II.

### THE CONSPIRATOR OF LOMBARDY.

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#### CHAPTER XI.

##### THE BRIDGE OF LODI.

ALTHOUGH, as I have shown, the Army of Italy had already won several glorious victories, little use had been made of the trooper, and I was yet to receive my "baptism of fire." This I underwent on the memorable 20th of Floreal, during the terrible action at the bridge of Lodi.

On that day I made one of a body of fifty men, chosen from the *chasseurs-à-cheval* of Damremont to act as a guard for the headquarters. The *corps des guides*, which was afterwards to grow in the Imperial Guard, had not yet been established. And the escort of General Bonaparte was taken in turn from the cavalry regiments, a detail from each serving on successive days.

As a rule none but the best mounted and most experienced troopers were taken for this duty. The first qualification my horse, Cassius, enabled me to answer well. The request Poignet d'Acier made to the captain in my behalf did the rest. So, throughout the 20th of Floreal I rode among the devoted band who watched over the safety of the General-in-chief.

We followed in the rear of General Bonaparte and his staff through the morning and the afternoon, while the army streamed steadily on toward Lodi. Steady, but by no means rapid was the advance. Austrian troops were retiring close before us, and whoever was in command of them, he had no mind to let us pursue our way in peace.



So persistently did the enemy oppose our van that the sun was fast nearing the horizon as we came in sight of the roofs of Lodi. Within the houses of the town the Austrians had gathered for a last desperate stand, and as we came on across the dusty plain at a gallop the musketry rolled furiously around the white walls while the cheers and cries of the combatants mingled and filled the air with horrible discords.

Before we reached the line of battle our men had carried the nearest houses, and the fight went roaring up the streets of the town, checked occasionally for a moment, but ever pushing toward the river.

Along the principal street, where the heavy smoke of gunpowder still hung in the air and the blood-plashed ground was so thickly sown with corpses that it was impossible for our horses to avoid stepping on them, and one could hear the bones crunch and splinter under the hoofs, we tore at headlong speed, and dashing by the farthest houses we pulled up at the bank of the river.

Before us rolled the Adda, perhaps two hundred yards wide here, spanned by the long, narrow bridge of wood that was the only passage. Across it the remnant of the Austrian rear-guard was still flying, pursued by the vicious bullets of our *tirailleurs*. On the opposite bank rose houses, filled, as we were presently to learn, with sharpshooters, and beyond them, on the level plain that ran to the mountains, we could see the long white lines of Beaulieu's infantry flanked by the glittering helmets and breastplates of the incomparable Austrian cavalry.

Even as we looked, the last of the fleeing footmen crossed the bridge and disappeared from view. Little jets and puffs of smoke spurted instantly from the windows of the houses on the eastern banks, and bullets began to hum about us like angry bees. Then a lurid tongue of red darted out from a sulphurous smoke-cloud up the river to our left, followed by another and another as the fire ran along in front of us, and to our right the air was filled with howling shell and shrapnel-shot, and our ears rang with the crash of cannon. Twenty guns were in battery to vindicate the passage, and their cross-fire had opened upon us.

A shell burst among a group of our infantry at the



head of the bridge and tore several men to fragments. A solid shot whizzed through the escort, leaving in its train the death-cry of a *chasseur* and the maddened scream of his lacerated charger. An aide-de-camp rolled dead from his saddle. Death was everywhere and our troops sought speedy cover behind the houses.

That is, all save the staff and the escort.

For General Bonaparte did not seem to heed the danger. Unmoved and emotionless amid the hail of iron and lead, the little man sat quietly in his saddle, with his great gray eyes scanning the opposite bank and his features, pallid as marble in their framing of long lank hair that fell to his coat collar.

Beside him, a little to the rear, Berthier, smooth-shaven as a priest and dressed in the highest degree of military coquetry that was possible under the Republic, passed his hand nervously across his chin and reined back his horse to ask a question of the fierce Masséna, whose rapacious black eyes glared out of his swarthy face with its vulture-like, Jewish features, as he mentally summed up the cost we were likely to pay for that long trestle of planks and timbers. Colonel Lannes was there, as were also Dallemagne, Dupas and Cerboni.

Running my eyes over them all I judged the crisis to be grave, for nods and frowns were passing among them, with ever more and more dissenting shakes of the head.

The General shouted an order to Berthier, and an aide-de-camp spurred madly back into the town. Presently, among the other noises, we heard the snap and cracking of whips, the clinking of chain, harness, and the grinding of wheels as artillery came thundering down the street and out upon the bank, crushing the dead and dying in its progress.

The guns swung round and the active cannoneers had them unlimbered and in action in a twinkling. Say what one might of the rest of the army, our artillery was always good. Few seconds elapsed from the time when the leading piece shot out from the street upon the level stretch of open ground that bordered the river until our shells were speeding toward the houses on the other side and the choking volumes of smoke were drifting back into our ranks.



That same smoke greatly interfered with my seeing for a time what was going forward. But at intervals it lifted, and as it blew past the lithe figures of the artillerymen were visible, working their guns with frantic energy. From the glimpses I caught of the staff I made out that a violent altercation was in progress there. Berthier and Masséna were talking to the Commander-in-chief, shaking their heads and gesticulating furiously. He seemed to listen undisturbed and his replies appeared to be delivered calmly enough. But once, in a sudden, curious lull in the tumult, his clear, penetrating voice I distinctly heard saying :

“Arguments avail nothing, citizen-generals. That is the way to Milan—to Rome—to the possession of all Italy. We must cross the Adda, let it cost what it may.”

Then the growl of the cannon filled my ears again and I could not hear what followed.

Aide after aide was sent back into Lodi, and I guessed that preparations to carry the bridge must be in progress there. Two of our guns seemed to be poorly directed, for I saw General Bonaparte, after watching the effect of our fire through his glass, dismount and himself correct their pointing, lying flat along the trails like an old artilleryman as he aimed the pieces. When they were trained to his satisfaction he remounted and continued searching the eastern bank with his glass to his eye.

The fire of the Austrians slackened by degrees, and then all of a sudden it stopped. Our guns continued to roar for some minutes longer. Finally the bugles blared the signal to cease firing. The wreaths of whirling smoke drifted away on the evening breeze. The last rays of the fast disappearing sun flashed back from our polished weapons, the tranquil river flowed noiselessly before us, and Peace seemed to have displaced the loud-voiced God of War.

General Bonaparte wheeled his horse and walked the beast toward the escort. He pulled up a dozen feet in front of us and ran his eye along the line. His glance met mine, and this time I did not quail from it. For a few seconds we stared steadily at each other. He raised his hand and beckoned to me. I rode forward and lowered my saber in salute.



"Your name, *chasseur* ?"

"Georges Luc, *mon général*, corporal in the regiment Damremont."

"Very well ; I know your features, I've seen you somewhere. *Par Dieu !* my young trooper of the despatches, isn't not so ?"

"True, *mon général*."

"I trust I have given you fighting enough since then, Citizen Luc ?"

"Not much falls to the cavalry, citizen-general. The infantry get it all."

"Let us hope for a change in the future. Do you feel as eager to risk your life now, *chasseur*, as you did when I first saw you ?"

"More, citizen-general. Only give me the chance," I said eagerly. He laughed and seemed well-pleased.

"*Diantre !* but I'll indulge you, never fear. Ride yonder to the middle of the road that crosses the bridge, and take position there facing me. In the town, abreast of the first cross street, you'll see an officer sitting on his horse. Keep your eyes on me, follow my movements wherever I go, and when I wave my sword do you repeat the signal with your own weapon until the man in the town follows your example. Then ride back and rejoin me. Do you understand ?"

"Clearly, *mon général*."

"Away with you, then !"

Gathering up my reins I saluted the General, wheeled Cassius about and trotted away to take my stand in the place he had indicated.

A glance into the town showed me no living being upon the street save the officer of whom General Bonaparte had spoken and his horse. There he was, sure enough, a lean, muscular-appearing man in the garb of a colonel in the infantry, astride of a handsome roan charger that stood opposite the mouth of the first cross street on the right of the road. He had evidently been expecting my appearance with impatience, for I saw a smile of satisfaction part his lips and he gave me a slight nod as a sign that he knew what I was there for. I returned the smile and then settled down in my saddle with my eyes fixed upon General Bonaparte.



The young Corsican was riding slowly toward me along the bank, checking his horse every few feet and anxiously examining the farther side of the Adda. A few paces behind him followed the other generals and the staff, stopping when he stopped, advancing again when he put his steed in motion. To within fifty feet of the head of the bridge they came, and there at last Bonaparte halted as if inclined to wait for a while. He had drawn his sword, but it hung dangling from his wrist while he kept his field-glass raised and fixed upon the enemy.

From my position I could see every feature of his face, clear cut and cold as the lines of an ancient cameo. It was calm and impassive as Fate. Not a muscle quivered in that stony countenance, no twitch of the mouth, no wrinkling of the brow, no flushing of the cheek, betrayed the fact that he was in the position of a gamester playing for a mighty stake. Had I not known otherwise I might have taken him for an ardent lover of Nature, pleased and content with the smiling Italian landscape that spread out before him.

Far otherwise showed the faces of those who had reined up a few paces behind him. Though I watched the General closely, I occasionally cast a swift glance at the staff, and in their set mouths and scowling foreheads I read that they felt doubt and apprehension of what was to come. Brave they all were, and gallant soldiers every one of them. But all, save Colonel Lannes and perhaps Masséna, lacked that implicit trust in Fate and complete indifference to danger that was so marked in the character of our great leader.

Indeed, the present moment meant far more to him than it did to them. Beyond that narrow bridge, though he knew it not, lay the glorious triumphs of Arcola, of Marengo, of Austerlitz, Jena, Friedland and Wagram. The fickle goddess of Victory beckoned to him from behind the Austrian cannon, urging him forward to grasp the reins of a power greater than man ever had before or than man has ever had since.

The critical moment in his life had come!

And, by all the oaths that ever soldier of France swore, I tell you that he did not fail to sustain the crisis.

Moment after moment he sat there, quiet in his



saddle, while the unquiet officers behind him moved uneasily in their seats and passed low mutterings of impatience among themselves. The General paid no attention to their whisperings and still continued to scan our waiting foemen. Only now his glass was directed mostly to their right flank and the country beyond it. Again and again his gaze turned to that quarter, ever at shorter intervals. Once he lowered his hands with the field-glass in them, and I saw that his eyes were flaming out of his white face with a light that was different from their usual steady, forbidding expression. His left leg, too, was drawn up somewhat along the flank of his horse, and the muscles of his calf shook noticeably beneath his leather boot. I plainly remarked this fact. All this I saw in a second, for in the next the General's glass was at his eye again and his hands covered his face.

The moments flew by, and still General Bonaparte kept gazing earnestly up the river. Why was he waiting? What did he expect from up stream?

The sun was almost set, and in a little while it would be too dark to fight. The Austrians were on their guard, and there was no hope that they would leave their lines to go and prepare their suppers until darkness had put an end to all likelihood of an assault. Why then did our chief delay giving the signal?

The notes of a bugle, then the far off rolling of drums floated across the river. Clearly some evolution was in progress among the Austrians. At least so I read the sounds.

As the thought passed through my head I saw General Bonaparte lower his glass, twitch the hilt of his sword into his hand and wave the blade in the air. On the instant I imitated his motion and saw that the horseman who waited in the street beyond me was following my example.

Suddenly the wild, high rattle of the drums beating the *pas de charge* rose in the depths of the cross-street I have mentioned, accompanied by hoarse-voiced shouts of command that seemed to run along a column of considerable length.

A few bounds of my steed carried me to the General's side, where I saluted, expecting further orders. But he did not look at me. His eyes were fixed



on the spot I had just vacated. Mine traveled thither also, but on the way they dwelt for a second on the Austrian right flank, the ground so earnestly watched by General Bonaparte. Clouds of dust were rising beyond the enemy's line, and squadrons of cavalry were coming into view.

I learned afterward that General Beaumont, with the whole of our horse, had been sent to cross by a ford three miles above the town, to flank Beaulieu. It was for his appearance that the Commander-in-chief had kept the assault delayed.

The rattling drums came nearer and nearer. The tramp of thousands of feet echoed behind them, and then with the swift rush and impetus of a mountain torrent a column of grenadiers burst from the town. Another instant and they were on the bridge.

The tricolor waved defiantly above the rushing column, the bayonets sparkled like fire below it, and under them the dark mass undulated like the body of some huge, monstrous serpent. Out upon the deserted planks they rushed. The General and the staff waved their hats as they went by. In return the air seemed rent by the hoarse, maddening cheer: "*Vive la République!*"

Swiftly the rush of the column swept out upon the bridge.

The eastern bank, so silent and harmless for the last half hour, awakened now, and found tongue in a roar that carried with it death. A sheet of flame flashed along its edge, and a volcanic burst of smoke belched forth and veiled the houses.

A second later, and the bridge became a hell. The leading files plunged forward dead upon the planks, or, pierced and mangled by the pitiless bullets, rolled one above the other, struggling and screaming in their terrible agony. Over their writhing forms those behind dashed, only to fall themselves a few steps further on, and to die under the trampling feet of the crowding hundreds that eagerly offered themselves to feed the cannon. On, on, on the dark tide of the column flowed, the officers holding their shakos on the points of their swords and shouting with their last breaths to their unflinching followers the order to advance. Like a mass of water that bursts from the wall of a broken dam it



surged sullenly forward, the rent and riddled tricolor staggering and swaying above the tossing foam of plumes and bayonets, pitching, nodding, lurching toward the planks at times, but never quite allowed to fall; for again and again strong hands snatched it from the dying grasp of those that were about to relinquish it and bore it onward toward the death-dealing guns.

With set teeth and leaping hearts we watched the progress of the grenadiers. Out there upon those blood-drenched timbers men were dropping in scores before our eyes, and the heaps of maimed and slaughtered heroes rose level with the side-rails of the bridge. Still on those gaunt and ragged children of the Republic pressed, ever flinging her name full in the teeth of Eternity with their defiant cheers.

Forward still, though the head of the column was swept away with every second. The first momentum of the charge was becoming spent, and an invisible power seemed to be holding back the front and pushing against its progress. Yet the grenadiers went on, though their pace was slower and slower, and won their way to the center of the passage.

There the column stopped, shivered, hesitated!

With outstretched neck and set features General Bonaparte had witnessed the awful progress of the grenadiers. His right hand he had reached forward upon his horse's neck, the small white fingers clutching the thick hair of the beast's mane. As he saw the halting of the charge his action was decisive and unhesitating. Promptly he flung himself from the saddle and rushed among the reeling ranks, calling fiercely to the men to make way.

I was off Cassius's back in the flash of a pistol, and saber in hand I followed the general. The soldiers opened before us, and over the bleeding limbs and palpitating bodies that covered the planks, we ran; the other generals and the staff-officers close at our backs. We reached the spot where the hail of lead was tearing to rags the flag of France. The hand of Bonaparte caught the standard and waved it high above his head.

*"On, men of the Army of Italy!"* he thundered.  
*"Follow your General!"*

*"Vive Bonaparte! Vive la République!"* pealed



from the ranks in wild response to his words, and again the men rushed forward.

Over the bridge we charged, Bonaparte, Masséna, and Berthier in the lead !

As we won to the farther end a horseman flashed by us, prodding the flanks of his maddened charger at every leap with his gory spurs and whirling a long, flashing blade in the air. Into the Austrian ranks that suddenly showed before us he forced his way, sending two of them to their last account with as many sweeps of his terrible saber, and hurling himself upon their color-bearer he wrenched the Imperial flag away from him.

The next instant a Kaiserlick's bayonet stabbed his steed, and the gallant beast fell with his rider. A score of weapons flashed above him, but the man was on his feet before they fell. With the leap of a tiger he sprang up behind a mounted Austrian officer, thrust him through the body and hurled him from his saddle. Urging the captured horse the while he cut furiously to the right and left, he laid three more of the enemy dead. And then we sprang upon the Austrians and he was safe. The gunners we bayoneted beside their cannon, and their supporting infantry we scattered in a few moments. The mad cavalier cast the captured banner at Bonaparte's feet crying :

“ *Vive la République !* ”

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PRIEST'S SISTER.

It was Colonel Lannes.

“ Ever the first to strike the enemy, eh? brave Lannes ! ” the General shouted, smiling proudly at the hero, while, unconsciously, I suppose, he set his foot upon the folds of silk that lay on the ground before him. Then, glancing around, his eye fell upon me, and he demanded sharply,

“ *Hola ! chasseur*, what are you doing here? Where are your comrades? It cannot be that you are the only one of my escort left alive ? ”

“ You ordered me to return to you, *mon général*, and



as you did not send me back to the ranks I supposed you might have further use for me. So I followed you when you ran to seize the flag."

"And devilish close he kept to you, let me tell you. General Bonaparte," Colonel Lannes broke in abruptly, "I marked that green jacket among the blue coats as I went by you, and *par Dieu!* yon boy was in front of Masséna, and that's something few in the army can boast. If you ever want a friend, citizen *chasseur*, remember that I saw you cross the Adda, and come to me. I'll not fail you."

"I will keep you in mind also, Corporal Luc," Bonaparte said. "You may resume your place in the ranks."

While we had halted at the Austrian guns, the infantry had kept streaming past and had cleared the houses, deploying as they emerged into the plain. Already the clatter of their musketry was rising as they met the whirling rush of a charge of the Imperial cavalry with a storm of lead, and beat back the avenging horsemen without even forming a square.

The escort, unable to join us until the grenadiers had passed the bridge, now came galloping up. They brought with them the chargers of the generals and the staff, and Poignet d'Acier rode up to me and thrust the bridle of Cassius into my hand.

"*Tonnerre de Ciel!*" he said, with a beaming face. "Did the general notice that thou wast by his side all the while?"

I nodded.

"Then thou'lt have a commission to-morrow. A captaincy were a small recompense for thy gallantry."

"Wait until I get it, Poignet d'Acier, and don't talk nonsense," I laughed. And then we galloped after the general, who was spurring toward the line-of-battle.

The Austrians quickly recovered from their amazement at the astounding feat of arms we had performed in carrying the bridge. Beaulieu had twelve thousand infantry and four thousand cavalry drawn up in the plain beyond the Adda, and he tried his best to crush the grenadiers before the rest of the army could cross to our assistance. But how vain were all the efforts of the veteran soldiers of Austria!

Meanwhile, as fast as they could be hurried over, regiment after regiment came to the relief of our out-



numbered force. Eager to emulate their comrades of the grenadiers, they fought like unchained demons. Our flanking cavalry, too, became more and more troublesome to Beaulieu, and at last he gave it up and drew back his army, leaving two thousand of them dead upon the field.

The army bivouacked for the night upon the Adda, while the enemy continued their retreat, falling back to find ultimate refuge in the Tyrol. Lombardy lay open to us, Angereau marched to Pavia, while the soldiers of the Laharpe and Serrurier divisions occupied Cremona and Cassano.

On the 26th of Floreal, General Bonaparte entered Milan. The inhabitants of that city were well-disposed to welcome the troops of the Republic. They hoped that the coming of the French would bring liberty to them, and they gave the conqueror an enthusiastic reception.

A forced levy of twenty millions for the army-chest rather cooled their revolutionary ardor. Yet, on the whole, they liked our rule better than that of the Austrians.

The general only stayed at the capital to gather the supplies and money needful to carry on the campaign, for he wished to give the Austrians no time to breathe. From the Duke of Modena he wrung ten millions more, as the price of leaving the duchy undisturbed. Thus did the little Corsican contrive to fill the bellies and cover the backs of his men as no other general of the Republic had done before.

Two thousand Austrians still held the citadel of Milan. But Masséna kept up a blockade, and they did not fire on the town as it was the property of their emperor. So we had a quiet time in our comfortable quarters and enjoyed the pleasures the city afforded to our hearts' content.

On the 2d day of Prairial (May 22d) I was summoned early in the morning to the quarters of Colonel Billot. That officer, handing me a bulky sealed envelope, spoke as follows :

“Corporal Luc, as you have the best horse in the regiment, I have chosen you to carry these despatches. You will set out at once for Pavia, where you ought to arrive by evening, and will deliver them to the officer



who commands there. To-morrow you will rejoin the regiment. Not at Milan, however, but at Lodi, for which place we march to-day. By sharp riding you will be able to reach there about the same time."

A week of rest and abundant food had done wonders for Cassius and he was in fine fettle for the road. Though the weather was beginning to be somewhat warm it was not unpleasantly hot, and I thoroughly enjoyed my long ride. I reached Pavia in the afternoon, delivered my despatches, and thinking to make some miles on my way to Lodi before dark I set out after the refreshment of myself and my horse had been attended to.

The sun was low as I rode into the village of Binasco, and there I determined to pass the night.

Approaching the yard of the principal inn I saw that a crowd of Italian peasants were gathered there, evidently engaged in watching some diverting entertainment. Pushing my steed in among them I found, to my surprise and gratification, that my old acquaintance Tric-trac, and his ape, Agricola, were providing amusement for the assemblage.

"Hola! Tric-trac, how goes the world with you?" I called out. "Where have you been this long time, comrade? I have not set eyes on you since the night before the battle of Montenotte."

"By all that's wonderful!" cordially replied the mountebank, ceasing his employment of drilling Agricola, "'t is my little friend citizen Sans-barbe. Campaigning seems to agree with you, my boy, I see that you've managed not to run against a bullet. What brings you here? Your regiment is at Milan, or it was there yesterday, I am sure."

"Duty, friend Tric-trac, that's all. I'm on my way back to the regiment now. But, to return your question, what are you and Agricola doing at Binasco?"

"Earning our bread, my boy. General Bonaparte has not as yet sent me my share of the late contributions," he said, winking facetiously, "so Agricola and I are hunting for coins as usual."

"As I intend to stop here for the night, we'll have a bottle and sup together after you're through," I began.

But Tric-trac interrupted. "It gives me grief to refuse, but I must be on the road again presently.



Agricola and I have a pressing engagement for this evening, and let me give you a bit of friendly advice, citizen Sans-barbe," he added, coming close to the flank of Cassius and lowering his voice. "If you are bound to stop in Binasco, don't put up at the inn. These peasants are no friends to our soldiers. Better ride up the street to the priest's house. There you'll fare like a king, and besides you'll be *safer*."

"Safer from what?" I demanded curiously.

"Never ask a question, but do as I say. Good-by now, or rather *au revoir*, for we'll meet again. *Attention*, Agricola. *Portez-armes!*" and Tric-trac turned once more to his ape and his audience.

I thought I might as well pay heed to what he advised. If the priest took me in I would undoubtedly get a better supper and a more comfortable bed than I could find in the inn. So I trotted away and was speedily directed by an old man, who was lounging in one of the open dooways that were frequent along the street, to the residence of him who watched over the spiritual welfare of the people of Binasco.

Indeed, I could have picked out the priest's house unaided, for it was the best-appearing one in the town, and moreover, the ecclesiastic himself was just dismounting from the back of an aged gray pony in front of the door.

I found the good father's outside much to my taste. He was a fat, jolly-looking little Italian, with red, rounded cheeks and roguish black eyes under his great shovel-hat. A well-developed paunch made his black churchman's cassock strain at the buttonholes, and I judged that this was no anchorite upon whom I had happened.

When I asked him if he would be pleased to afford me food and shelter for the night he answered promptly in a jovial voice :

"Assuredly, *signor*, the weary and hungry are ever welcome beneath my roof. You may stable your horse here too, for I have quarters for my good little Chrysostom," patting the flanks of his pony, "in the yard behind the house. Wait for a moment while I call my sister, and I will show you where to bestow him.—Teresa !"

A woman appeared in the doorway, flashing a pair



of great black eyes at me and showing a set of beautiful teeth as she smiled at the good father. She was no longer very young, probably between twenty-eight and thirty I should say, but she was undeniably handsome, with the fervid, voluptuous beauty of the women of the South. She perhaps showed too much the effects of the good feeding that I had mentally ascribed to the house on viewing its owner, and was a little, a very little, too fat. But with her lustrous eyes and midnight hair, her well-cut nose and scarlet, full-lipped mouth, her shapely shoulders and spreading hips,—*sapristi!* I say again that she was a woman worth looking at. For the moment I wished for a mustache, even a red one like Pierre Santron's.

“This is my sister Teresa, *signor*. She is a widow and keeps my house for me. Theresa the *cavallero* will stay with us to-night. Let us have a supper that he will relish. Now, *signor*, we will put up the beasts.”

Teresa smiled and flashed another wicked glance at me as I led Cassius and followed her brother. While I cared for the wants of the troop-horse you may be sure that I thought of those eyes. *Diable!* but I—never mind what I thought!

At last our task was done and Cassius and the pony made comfortable. Into the house we went, the priest leading me into a large room on the left of the door. The place was very comfortable, almost richly furnished, I might say. But I took little note of the apartment just then. A man was standing by one of the two windows. Supposing him to be some peasant in search of ghostly counsel I would have retired.

But at our entrance he turned, showing his face, and with a furious oath I grasped my saber. For I recognized the never-to-be-forgotten features of landlord Giacomo.



## CHAPTER XIII.

“MADONNA ! MUST I SEE YOU DIE !”

IN one bound I covered the space between us, and the point of my ready blade quivered at the landlord's throat.

“In the name of the Republic,” I cried, as I placed my left hand on his shoulder, “I arrest you. Stir a hand and I run you through, Master Giacomo !”

The old villain seemed not in the least disturbed by my action. He met my gaze with a calm and gentle eye, and his voice as he spoke was smooth and unruffled.

“You have made a mistake, *signor* soldier,” he said. “My name is not Giacomo and I am not he for whom you take me. I am called Lanciotto, a poor vender of wines in the city of Pavia.”

“I'm well acquainted with the vintage you deal in,” I sneered, “I've tried it. A trifle too highly spiced to sit well on the average stomach, eh? Bah! don't think to deceive me with your Lanciotto, old friend. I've wished for this meeting too ardently to mistake you. You are coming with me, do you hear? You will probably live a few hours longer, if you come quietly.”

“And where do you propose to take me, young *signor*?” he demanded in the same unconcerned manner.

“Back to Pavia,” I answered with decision. “If you sleep at all to-night you'll close your eyes in a French guard-room.”

“I had intended to pass the night with the good Father Giulio,” he observed. “Still, since Pavia is my home I may as well go thither now as to-morrow morning. *You* will be the only person inconvenienced if you will go back with me, *signor*. For I warn you that I am known to your officers, and will be given my liberty at once.”

“For your sake I'm willing to put up with some fatigue, Giacomo,” I smiled, tightening my grip on his



shoulder. "Will you pardon my leaving you thus abruptly, good father?" I added, addressing the priest, but never letting my eyes wander from the landlord's face.

The little churchman had been too astonished to speak. But now he managed to find his tongue and shouted out a rush of voluble remonstrances.

"In the name of the Madonna! my son, how can you have the heart to act thus? To draw your sword upon the worthy Master Lanciotto and threaten him with death! To tell him that he does not know his own name! and to say that he shall spend the night in a guard-room! and to think of going back to Pavia when Teresa is to cook your supper! And all because Master Lanciotto so closely resembles his twin brother Giacomo, who lives many, many miles away from Binasco at an inn he keeps in the mountains."

"Why did you not keep silent on that point, Father Giulio?" my prisoner said reproachfully. "Why not let the foolish boy take me to Pavia, and find out his own mistake? The laughter of his comrades might be a lesson for him and teach him to act more circumspectly in future. He is hasty, you can see, even for a youth of his years. Unless he learn caution, 'tis like enough *he won't live very long.*"

"If he doesn't expire before he hands you over to the guard at Pavia he'll die content, Giacomo," I said with a sneer. "So come along. I hope you have a horse here? If not I intend to requisition your pony, good father."

"Requisition Chrysostom! The Saints forbid!" the priest exclaimed. "Surely, son, you cannot persist in your purpose when I, the Father Giulio, tell you that you are acting under a false impression!"

"False or true I take him a prisoner to Pavia," I declared curtly. "If this man has no horse he rides your pony. And the word is 'boots and saddles.'"

"Nay, nay, good son, be not so obstinate," entreated the Father Giulio. "Can you not take my word that what he says is true? I swear to you that I have known him for years, and his brother also. They are twin sons of Stefanone, the wine-grower, and they are so like each other that one can scarce tell them apart. Ask any one of the country here and he will



tell you the same thing. If you cannot place faith in what I tell you, ask Teresa. A capital idea that! Ho! Teresa! Teresa!"

"I will not be beguiled from doing my duty, Father Giulio," I began. But at that moment, in answer to her brother's calls, Teresa appeared in the doorway.

She gave a little cry of surprise as she saw my naked saber, and coming swiftly forward demanded: "What is this, my brother? What means this appearance of violence? Surely our guests have not quarreled?"

"Nay, no quarrel at all, my sister," the priest managed to answer before I could say a word. "Our gallant young soldier has mistaken the good Master Lanciotto for his brother Giacomo, with whom, it seems, he has some feud. Therefore, he insists that our neighbor is his prisoner, and orders him to prepare to set out for Pavia in his company."

Teresa looked blankly from her brother to me.

"Mistaken Master Lanciotto for his brother Giacomo!" she repeated, then suddenly cried: "Heavens! *signor*, what a dreadful mistake!"

"Aye, dreadful, indeed!" Father Giulio supplemented eagerly. "And worst of all the military *signor* will not be convinced that he *is* at fault. Speak to him, my sister, and let your words add weight to what I have sworn.

"Truly it is as my brother says, *signor*," the lady affirmed, fixing me with her great black eyes. "I know the Master Lanciotto well, for he comes often to drink a glass of wine or to take a meal with us. It is he whom you have in your power, and no other. I have seen his brother, the innkeeper, and I do not wonder at your error. But you *are* wrong, believe me."

Had the priest of Binasco been unsupported in his assertions as to my prisoner's identity Cassius would have made the journey to Pavia once more that day. But Teresa's manner was so earnest and her eyes seemed so full of truth, that as a gentleman and a Frenchman there was but one course for me to follow.

I dropped my hand from the old man's shoulder, stepped back and slowly returned my saber to its scabbard.

"The word of my beautiful hostess suffices," I said,



with the best grace in my power, "and I acknowledge that I have been at fault. To you I shall offer no apologies, Master Lanciotto, for you can readily understand how one who has met your brother might think you Giacomo. I renounce my intention of arresting you and beg you to consider yourself at liberty."

Lanciotto smiled sarcastically.

"I thank you most humbly for your change of determination, *signor* soldier," he voiced. "I am little inclined for a ride just now and much prefer the cookery of her whom you call your 'beautiful hostess' to a supperless journey. As you say, my likeness to my brother often causes me uncomfortable moments. *You* seem especially anxious to meet him. I trust he has done nothing to bring him into disfavor with your soldiers?"

"Disfavor! Far from it," I returned jovially. "He has too hospitable a heart, Giacomo, to ever fall into the bad graces of men of the sword. To confess the truth, Master Lanciotto, what passed just now was done on my part by way of a jest. A squad from my regiment happened to stop with your brother over night, and you may be sure that they met with royal entertainment. Before we left, Giacomo chanced to remark upon my youth and apparent want of strength. And I told him that if ever I met him away from his mountain home he should see that I was fully able to take care of myself. *That* is why I *pretended* to arrest him just now."

Though I spoke with affected carelessness, I nevertheless closely watched Master Lanciotto's countenance, hoping to detect some change of feature that would betray a knowledge of the hidden meaning in my words. There was none, so far as I could see. The wine-merchant heard me with polite interest, and when I had finished remarked :

"That is just like Giacomo. He has a weakness for the soldiers, and always gives them the best his house contains. And he forgets that he grows old, too old to engage in foolish wagers. With a stout lad like yourself he would have little chance. Did your comrades remain long at my brother's house?"

The words were frankly uttered, but it seemed to me that they contained sneers at my own slight frame and



the mournful fate of the luckless Roussel and his men. I darted a glance of fire at Lanciotto. His face was innocence itself.

"They stayed so long that the rest of the regiment are wild to be guests of Giacomo, Master Lanciotto," I answered in a voice that trembled somewhat in spite of my efforts to control it. "To visit his dwelling is the most ardent hope of many a *chasseur-à-cheval* of Damremont."

"May they find a fitting welcome awaiting them," he rejoined, turning away from me to converse with the Father Giulio.

Teresa left the room to resume her interrupted duties in the kitchen, whither I would gladly have followed her had not the priest noticed my movement toward the door and frankly requested me to remain.

"Master Lanciotto and I have no private matters to discuss, *signor*," he said, "and we will be glad to have your company in our conversation. Teresa, too, will do better at preparing a meal, without that braided jacket of yours to distract her attention. The women all go daft over a uniform, you know, and I am sure she would never give the dishes proper seasoning with one so near her."

Of course I had no choice but to stay, so I settled back into a chair. I listened idly while the two Italians gossiped about the affairs of the neighborhood.

Thus the time passed until Teresa announced that our supper awaited us. An excellent meal it was, and excellent appetites did we bring to it. Though I could see that Father Giulio did not relish my doing so, and that Master Lanciotto looked a shade grave over what I said, I was lavish in my praises of the widow's cookery.

No woman ever found flattery distasteful. Therefore Teresa devoted herself to caring for my wants, pressing dish after dish upon me and keeping my glass full, which was no light task, as I remember.

Our appetites satisfied we returned to the large front room, where Master Lanciotti and I were begged by the priest to have no scruples about indulging our desire for tobacco. A bottle of wine choicer than the vintage we had imbibed at our supper was produced, and we settled down for a comfortable evening.



Tired by my long ride, I was well content to leave the conversation to my host and Lanciotto. Therefore I smoked silently and listened to them, occasionally taking a sip from the goblet that stood within easy reach of my hand on a small table.

Teresa came in with some sewing, and sat down near me, evidently ready for more compliments. She got them to her heart's content. Mentally, I sent the wine-merchant and Father Giulio to the devil, devoting myself wholly to the latter's handsome sister. I suppose evenings at that house were as a rule dull and long for her, for she kept up a constant chatter and started guiltily when the priest at last remarked rather sharply,

"The usual hour for your retiring has arrived, sister Teresa."

"My sister has not been very well of late, and I insist upon her keeping regular hours," he observed, when the lady had left us. "I'm very fond of Teresa, and I would not for the world that she should be ill."

Perhaps half an hour longer I remained, smoking and nodding in my chair. Finally, weary of the society of my Italian friends, I desired to be shown my resting-place for the night.

Father Giulio lighted a candle, led me to the foot of a wide pair of stairs that ascended from the hall, and, pointing upward, said:

"Your door is at the top on the landing, *signor*, directly to your left. Good night, and may you rest well."

With that he gave the candle into my hand and returned to Lanciotto, while I slowly ascended the steps, and pushing open the door he had indicated, sauntered drowsily into the chamber.

But on the instant every vestige of gathering somnolence fled from my brain, for as I held my candle high to take a view of the apartment, its rays fell upon the figure of a woman standing directly before me, one hand raised in sign of caution, the forefinger of the other pressed earnestly upon her lips.

Amazed and doubting, I glared at her, scarce able to credit my senses. For, with a face white as death and her great eyes afire with a gleam that was half of fright, half of determination, the form of the *contessa*



Aliandra had risen from the shadows of this room in the house of the priest of Binasco!

A thin wrapper of dark-colored silk, hastily thrown on, had fallen away from her neck and bosom, displaying their incomparable outlines and betraying the fact that beneath this robe she wore no other covering than her night-gear.

Soldiers of France learned early to keep their wits about them in those days. Calmly I closed the door, placed my candle on a little stand near the bed, then stepped to the lady's side.

"You!" I gasped.

"Yes." 'Twas scarce a flutter of those lovely lips.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"Speak low, and do as I bid you without question." she answered in a voice that I could barely catch.

"Ah! I knew that I could not be mistaken, that it must be *you*. Teresa's description, as she assisted in my night toilet, made me fear. She said you recognized Giacomo!"

"Aha!"

"Then I recognized your voice in the room below. So I crept here, because I would not have you die."

"Die, *contessa*, who talks of dying?" I demanded.

"There are those below who even now talk of *kill-ing*," she said with an earnestness that drove conviction to my heart. "As soon as they think you asleep they will act. If they find you here, Monsieur Luc—" She paused.

"If they find me, *contessa*?" I repeated.

"Then — they — will — cut — your — throat." She brought out the words with a distinct interval between each one of them. "Oh, why did you come, Monsieur Luc, *you* of all men."

"Never take it to heart, *mademoiselle*," I interposed consolingly. "You exaggerate my situation. Believe me, I should be a poor soldier of the Army of Italy were I not able to take care of two wretched Italians."

The girl's eyes flamed with anger, and she threw her head haughtily back.

"You may learn—aye, and that shortly, too, *monsieur*, that Italians are not to be despised. To your consternation, you and the rest of our oppressors may



find—but I will not stoop to answer your taunt. Your life hangs on every second, and I am here to save you. Come!”

She moved across the floor without noise, and in the action I saw that her little bare feet glistened white as snow. Quietly she unlatched the casement of the window.

“Your path lies there,” she whispered hurriedly. “Fly, and fly quickly. Your life depends upon it. In the dark you must contrive to saddle your horse and—”

She caught her breath and ceased speaking, standing with her head lowered, as if she were listening intently to some sound from without.

I heard the thump of horses’ feet come galloping up the road and stop before the house. An imperious, impatient voice called so distinctly that every word fell clear upon my ears:

“Ho! Giulio, hasten at once to take my beast. Has Giacomo yet arrived?”

The *contessa* wrung her hands with a gesture of despair.

“It is too late!” she gasped, turning to me a face drawn and gray with fear. “*He* has come. There are others with him, and now you cannot escape! Madonna!” raising her eyes to Heaven in pitiful appeal, “*must I see him murdered?*”

“That you shall not, *mademoiselle*,” I said in tones of quiet confidence. “The arrival of Count Luca (for I remembered the voice well) has not lessened my certainty of victory. I have my pistols and my saber. Watch, and you shall see that I know how to use them.”

“No, no, it must not be,” the girl murmured with trembling lips. “There is that you know not of, and resistance is out of the question. You must not fight, you cannot fly. And yet I *will* save you in spite of them. Where can I hide you—where?”

“Perhaps if I made a bold rush for the door, *mademoiselle*,” I suggested.

“You would never get down the stairs alive. Hear them! The lower floor is full of men. Let me think. Ah!” she caught her breath. Her cheeks, her neck and the bosom that were so white one moment since now



flamed a vivid crimson. Her lips set firmly, and she fixed her eyes intently upon my own.

"There is but one chance," she whispered slowly. "There is but one place they know you *cannot* be."

"And where is that?" I asked.

"My—my chamber."

"Pardon me! My life shall not be saved by your blushes, *mademoiselle*." I kissed her hand, drew my sword, and stepped to the door.

"It shall! You saved more than life to me. That you decline is proof that I can trust you! For my *sake* come!" Her little hand was on my arm entreatingly. Her eyes had in them a piteous appeal. "Madonna! Must I see you die? No, no, have pity on me, if not upon yourself—come!"

"*I am at mademoiselle's command!*"

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## CHAPTER XIV.

"YOUR HORSE CARRIES THE FATE OF THE ARMY OF ITALY!"

"PULL off your boots and drop them down on the floor so as to make a noise," she spoke rapidly, even as I bowed before her. "Then pick them up and carry them in your right hand, you will need the left to hold your saber so that it shall not clank. Make haste."

As I followed her instructions, Aliandra glided to the window again and threw the casement half-open.

"They will think you went that way," she breathed in my ear when she returned. "Now, follow me."

Without noise she blew out my candle, and opened the door. In an instant we were in the hall and the *contessa* carefully closed the door behind us.

Silently as spirits we passed along the hallway and entered a room at the farther end. The dim light of a small lamp showed me that this was unquestionably the bedchamber of Aliandra. She locked the door and slipped a great bolt into its place. Then she turned to me as I stood eying her in silence.

"Take a seat in yonder chair, *monsieur*," she ordered, pointing to one that stood nearly at the farther end of the room. "You will have some time to wait here



and you must be content to keep silence. Besides there is nothing that we can have to say to each other."

She seated herself upon a distant couch when she finished speaking, and drew her wrapper more closely about her shoulders. But a thousand emotions, conjured up by her spiritual beauty, her divine grace, drew me to her.

"We *have* more to talk of, *mademoiselle*," I murmured, my voice suppressed but tender with passion. "You cannot have forgotten my words to you when we parted. Then I told you of my love, to which now you add a mighty gratitude."

The girl rose to her feet, her countenance was haughty, even scornful.

"But, *contessa*," I repeated, "you cannot have forgotten—"

"Hush!" she broke in, while her features expressed pain and determination also. "You are making me remember what you are. Ungenerous one, can you not appreciate what I have done for you? Cannot the soldier of France raise his thoughts above the dull ideas of the peasant? But have a care, *monsieur*, one cry of mine, and your life would pay the forfeit of your temerity. Therefore be warned."

What she said made my heart ache, for I had not dreamed of insult to her.

"You have recalled me to myself, *mademoiselle*," I whispered earnestly, "you have made me feel that the rough *sans-culotte* has no place here. The Deity whom you worship reward you for your goodness to me! I had hoped that some day I might be able to prove my gratitude. That, perchance, Fate may now not grant. Madonna have you in her keeping! I will not further incommode you." My hand was rapidly unbarring the door.

"But you would go to your death?" This, with a muffled cry.

"Better that than to remain and endure your displeasure," I muttered, and I meant my words. "Open, *mademoiselle*, and if you care to look on you shall see how a *peasant* can quit this world."

"Do you really feel gratitude for what I have done?" she demanded.



"I never lie, *mademoiselle*. Some Republicans have at least that virtue," I said proudly.

"Then prove your sincerity by doing what I wish," she retorted. "Yonder is the chair. By occupying it let me know that you speak truth."

I bowed my head, walked from her and seated myself in silence, while the *contessa* with a low sigh sank into another chair, her lovely face covered by her hand. So we counted the moments.

The house was silent now, and no sound arose to break the monotonous quiet of the night. Perhaps ten minutes dragged by—it seemed an hour. A sudden yell of rage and wonder, coming from the room where the Italians deemed I slept, brought me to my feet.

We held our breath and waited.

Carefully enough, I suppose, the miscreants must have stolen to my chamber, but now they made no pretense of caution. Eagerly they rushed about the house, searching room after room, their furious oaths proclaiming their lack of success. We heard one of them go down the stairs in great bounds, and the outer door slammed to with a crash.

Two of them presently came along the hall, and paused before our door.

"He can't be *there*, *illustrissimo*," the tones of Father Giulio feebly objected.

"You fool, don't I know *that*?" replied the enraged voice of Count Luca.

"But how about your sister? The fair Teresa looked lovingly on him!" came to me in the smooth tones of the wily Giacomo.

"Holy Virgin!" cried the priest. "You impugn my sister's honor. You don't think he can be—?"

But a thundering kick on a near-by door drowned his voice. "Open, girl!" cried the innkeeper.

The next instant I heard the door give way, then Teresa's cries, and an exclamation of horror from the priest, mingled with a shrill masculine voice imploring mercy, and screaming: "Spare my life—I promise marriage, gentlemen."

Over this came Count Luca's jeer: "*Diavolo!* This is no French cavalryman; 'tis Ludovico, the apothecary's assistant!" Likewise a guffaw of hideous merri-



ment from Giacomo, as he kicked the unfortunate Lothario along the hall and down the stairs.

I glanced at my lovely saviour, her face in shame unutterable, was buried in her hands. Her shrinking attitude told me how much she had risked to save my worthless life.

But still I think the apothecary's assistant had a good deal to do with my ultimate escape. His discovery certainly put an end to all further search of the house. I could hear Luca's suppressed merriment as the *padre*, in tones of horror, anathematized his sister as he led the sobbing Teresa away.

A moment after I started, and so did my protectress, as the count's voice sounded outside our door. "Be not alarmed, Aliandra," he called out, "there is no danger to you in all this hurry. To sleep again, fair cousin, and may your dreams be pleasant."

"Thank you, Luca, I will sleep, secure in your protection," the *contessa* answered, though her voice had a slight tremble in it. Just then hasty returning footsteps rang on the stairs, and we heard the old Giacomo snarl breathlessly :

"*Diavolo !* he has got away, without dispute ! I have been to the stables, and that lean beast of his is gone ! Curse him ! Must we always miss him ?"

"Not of a necessity, Giacomo," Count Luca said, more quietly than I anticipated. "The bird may be on the wing, but he'll not fly far. Though the dark favor him, you know well what he'll be likely to meet after the sun is up. But to make all sure, let us away at once. Both of you know what is to be done. The time has come ! Bid all hands to the harvest."

They tramped away immediately ; the banging door showed they had gone out. Count Luca lingered for a moment to cry : "Pray for me, Aliandra. You know to what end I depart."

Then his footsteps followed those of the others.

I would have spoken, but Aliandra, by her hand, enjoined me still to silence. Some five minutes passed and then the tramp of steeds broke the interval as they rode out of the yard.

The *contessa* unbarred the door. With the gesture of dismissal, she said :

"You may depart now, Monsieur Luc. Once clear



of the house you must depend upon your own resources. I shall pray that you may regain your friends unharmed."

"You say that, *contessa*," I broke in joyfully. "You do not forget, then?"

"No, I do not forget," she said softly. "I have often wondered how you and the *maître-d'armes* fared in your flight, and what good or evil fortune has been your lot since then. The Madonna has heard my prayers—"

"Your prayers!" I echoed in rapture.

"Yes, my prayers. Should not he to whom I owe something more precious than life have a place in them?" she said almost savagely. Her face which had been pale grew red with blushes, and she went on hurriedly: "But tell me what you have experienced since then. You have made at least one step on the road to fame. Your sleeves bore no chevrons when you were at the cottage of Gianetta."

Though speed perhaps meant my life, I was nothing loth to gratify her curiosity, it gave me a few more minutes of those beautiful eyes, the vivacious loveliness of her exquisite face. Eagerly, and, I fear, boastfully I recounted all that had befallen me since we parted.

"Glorious!" she murmured, as if carried away despite herself. What opportunities to make a name! And there will be more of them, Monsieur Luc, and that very soon; your troops are gathering for further conquest, is it not so?" Her voice had a soft but eager inquiry in it.

"Really I cannot say, *mademoiselle*," I answered. "All was quiet at Milan when I left."

"General Bonaparte was at Lodi when I departed this morning," she said. "The town is filled with soldiers, and rumor declares that they are to march against the white coats. Tell me, Monsieur Luc," she spoke with a vehemence that contrasted strongly with her alluring tone of a moment before, "what would happen when your general again advanced, *should the country rise in his rear?*"

"What would happen if the country should rise, *mademoiselle?*" I repeated after her. "Pardon me, but I am not certain that I comprehend."



"My words are plain enough," she replied with impatient flash of eye and pout of lip. "Suppose that the French move to meet the Austrians, and that while they are thus engaged, the people of Italy take arms, and, led by their nobles, fall in their might upon the invaders. What would happen then, I ask you?"

"Ah," I answered, as I smiled into her expectant eyes. "I can tell you what would certainly happen. The heirs of those same nobles you mention would come into their inheritances very suddenly; a host of new-made Italian widows would be weeping over the red embers of what were of late their homes."

"I cannot believe it," she muttered, as her face grew pale and drawn.

"What else could be the outcome?" I said sharply. "Think you that such men as Count Luca and Giacomo, who choose the night for their feats of arms, could stand for a moment against the heroes who braved the Austrian guns at Lodi?"

"I will not listen to you," she exclaimed. "My cousin loves his country, and the end justifies the means. The day will come when his name shall be blazoned throughout Italy as that of a great and patriotic leader."

I could not repress a laugh.

"I see you place no faith in what I predict," she said, flushing. "Perhaps before many hours have passed you may recall my words. And now you must go. You have delayed too long as it is."

"I cannot leave you unprotected, *mademoiselle*," I objected. "At any moment those villains may return."

"You forget, sir, that those '*villains*' are my countrymen," she answered proudly.

"At least before I go, *mademoiselle*," I pleaded, "tell me that you believe I love you. I shall leave you in that hope."

"Hope!" she echoed wonderingly, yet her eyes fell before mine and the soft color deepened in her cheeks,— "I, a countess, you, a *sans-culotte*—hope?"

"Yet, *mademoiselle*," I cried desperately, "if I were a general, you might come to love me were I nobly born?"

"*Peste!* you are foolish with your *ifs!*" she cried, and laughed in my face.



Then—her eyes were to blame! I could not help it. Madly I caught her to my breast, pressing my lips passionately upon her own. For a second—or was it but my heated fancy?—*it was returned*. Then she slipped from me with a frightened cry.

“A gentleman would not have done that,” she panted. The tears sprang to her beautiful eyes.

The atrocity of my act came home to me. The reproachful, sorrowing glance of the *contessa* showed me the despicable thing that I was, unworthy the name of man or of soldier. My heart filled with the abasement of sickening shame.

“*Mademoiselle*,” I cried wildly, “you are right. *Mon Dieu!* you speak the truth! I am only a miserable *sans-culotte!* I dare not ask for your forgiveness. And yet, *contessa*, my love for you will be my guiding star to honor.”

Softly, earnestly her eyes met mine, the radiance of a great pity shining through the unshed tears.

“I believe you,” she whispered, “and I forgive you. Farewell.” She extended an adorable hand.

But I turned from her and bounded, like one bereft of his senses, down the stairs and out of the house.

Had I stayed, ruffian that I was, I should have kissed her again.

Scarcely had I passed the threshold when a hand with a grip of steel closed upon my shoulder and dragged me into the shadow of the building. Thus rudely recalled to prudence I grappled eagerly with my unknown assailant. My fingers were closing upon his throat with intent to throttle him when a quick whisper caused me to alter my purpose.

“’Tis a friend, Citizen Sans-barbe,” came in the well-known voice of Tric-trac.

“A friend who sent me to almost certain death some hours since?” I answered angrily. “A pretty trick you played me, juggler, in recommending me to seek lodgings at a house that held Giacomo.”

“I give you my word that I knew not *he* was there until I saw him ride away,” Tric-trac said, with a vehemence that made me credit his words. “I came hither in the trail of Count Luca, whom I have followed—but that is of no interest to you. When the count stopped at the priest’s house I saw at once that you



would be in peril. Thinking to serve you, I removed your horse from the stable."

"My horse! you know where Cassius is, then?" I demanded joyfully.

"He awaits you at a few yards from here, saddled and ready. Come, you must ride as never you rode before!"

"What do you mean?"

"There's no time for explanations. Is your horse a good one?"

"The best in the regiment. Why?"

"Why? Because the nobles and priests are rousing the peasants. They have told them that the Holy Father at Rome bids them take arms and massacre the French. By morning all Lombardy will be ablaze. Nothing can stop the outbreak, but the Little Corporal must know of it at once. Come!"

He led me to a spot some hundred paces distant, where we found Agricola holding the bridle of Cassius. I sprang to the saddle at once.

"Here," Tric-trac said, thrusting a letter into my hand, "this bit of paper contains all that the general should know. Let nothing but Death stop you. Deliver that into Bonaparte's own hands. God speed you. *Your horse carries the fate of the Army of Italy!*"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THROUGH THE UPRISING VILLAGES.

THE mountebank's words were too earnestly uttered to admit my doubting him. Without replying I thrust the billet into the breast of my jacket, turned the head of Cassius eastward and departed at a brisk trot.

Unmolested I gained the open country and pushed swiftly onward alone in the night—alone, save for my thoughts.

Rapturously I recalled the Lady Aliandra's blushing cheeks, her trembling lips, the soft pressure of her hands ere I released them. Without question I had stirred some feeling in her heart. No mere gratitude could



cause such manifestations of emotion as those I dwelt upon with the greedy delight of a miser calculating the amount of his worshiped hoard of wealth.

But then the words she had spoken, the cruel words that bade me lay aside all hope *because I was not a noble!* I gritted my teeth and cursed it more fervently than ever I had done before, this loathed privilege of aristocracy that all who possessed it seemed to value above everything.

I had watched nobles as they rode in the tumbrils to where the knife and basket waited for them. I had shouted with the Parisian populace while they mounted the steps of the scaffold. What was it belonging to them that I had not? How were they better than I, those languidly smiling, pallid gentlemen, so carelessly graceful as, with their dainty handkerchiefs, they flicked the grains of snuff from their faces, beneath the very shadow of the guillotine? They were brave, I admitted that. But was I to hold myself a coward, I who had been before Masséna at Lodi?

As for Count Luca, if nobles were such as he, how could Aliandra think rank desirable?

And yet there *must* be something in it, there must be some quality, some attribute I could not understand that made the *noblesse* beings apart from the majority of mankind. Before me rose the vision of the woman of my dreams, the victim of the *Place de la Révolution*. *Hers* was the fairest, noblest face I had ever seen, until I met with Aliandra. *She* had been an aristocrat. It could not be a thing to be contemned, to be of a race like hers.

In truth, from what class of people was I sprung?

A wild suggestion leaped in my heart, finding there for the moment a kind of encouragement. Might I not be the offspring of some titled family whose race had been crushed by the power of the Revolution. For all I knew the blood of the Rohans flowed in my veins. Could I but prove it—

Cassius stumbled and I came back to the realities of life. A pretty train of thought I had been pursuing, in truth. What! Georges Luc, who swore by Marat and lauded Santerre, to be wishing that he were a count or marquis! Better far to be the accomplished ape of the



mysterious Tric-trac ! Agricola, at all events, could earn his living.

They puzzled me, that curious pair of comrades ! What manner of man was this strolling mime who took such a lively interest in the fate of the Army and could venture to write a letter to General Bonaparte ?

Should I not have questioned him further ere I set out to do his bidding and run the risk of a reprimand for delivering false tidings ? No, *par Dieu !* the man spoke truth, he could not be lying. The peasants were in revolt against us. My ears told me that I was not the only one abroad that night. Strange sounds were borne across the fields to me on the wings of the breeze.

Curious noises, that would have been unintelligible to the citizen traveler, my practised ear understood at once.

Men were gathering under cover of the darkness, their far-off tramp as they marched making the hum I could not mistake. Once I saw the flash and heard the faint report of a musket, discharged by accident, no doubt, by some careless or unaccustomed handler of the weapon.

The mustering villagers kept to the fields, and while night prevailed I met no one on the road. Luck was with me. The hours of darkness I improved to the utmost. The short gray of the morning and the sudden burst of the sun found me far advanced on my road.

Despite what Tric-trac had said I made halt at the first house standing near the highway that I chanced upon after sunrise. There, without dismounting, I called lustily until my cries brought a scared-appearing, slatternly drab of a peasant-woman to the door. From her I demanded breakfast, offering money for acquiescence and threatening violence in case of refusal.

What she gave me I ate in the saddle. Yet, as she loitered about, eying me with respectful curiosity not unmixed with admiration of my gay *chasseur* dress, I presently began to talk with her. Learning that no men were at home, I relieved Cassius of my weight, fed and watered him, and let him rest for near an hour, taking the road again in much improved condition.

The rays of the sun soon began to beat upon me with



full force and the highway was exceedingly dusty. Though I slackened my pace at times to ease the sweating beast beneath me I still pushed steadily on.

There were no peasants at work in the fields on that day. I did not remark this fact at first, but as mile after mile of the road was left behind me I found myself noticing the absence of the broad hats and white shirts of the men, the gay head-kerchiefs and brightly-colored skirts of the women from the other features of the landscape.

Again and again as I passed villages the ringing of bells fell upon my ears. Yet I fancied that their pealing differed from the solemn, deliberate notes of the call for divine service. There was a hasty, feverish clang to the bells.

Were they sounding the tocsin? I shook my bridle to quicken the steadily trotting Cassius.

The hours of morning slipped away and it was nearly noon. I was approaching a little village whose houses began to separate themselves and take shape under my gaze. The road I followed ran directly through the place.

I took my pistols from my holsters, thrusting them into my belt, loosened my saber in its scabbard and closed my knees more firmly upon the good steed beneath me.

Into the village I clattered, casting sharp eyes to right and left as I rode up the one narrow street.

The first few houses I passed seemed tenantless, neither man nor woman showing at door or window. Half way through the town, however, stood what appeared to be a small *cabaret*, and before it I made out several villagers who had marked my approach. At least I saw one of them pointing toward me, and gestures on the part of others showed that I was of interest to the group. As I came near they abruptly turned and withdrew within the wineshop.

One man came out alone immediately and advanced to a position in the middle of the road as I trotted up. A good-looking fellow he was, stalwart, brown-skinned and merry-eyed. He wore no coat, and his white shirt was open at the throat and on the chest as if he felt the heat. He held a flask in one hand, a goblet in the



other, and waved them temptingly in the air as he smiled up at me.

I answered his smile by one as frank, but my gaze flew past him through the shadowy door of the inn. Several men were standing inside, and my eyes made out the barrels of as many muskets rising to an aim.

Like a flash I was lying flat along Cassius's neck, and vigorously I gave the spur.

The good bay bounded like a mad thing as I gored his flanks.

There was a crash as he struck the wine-bearer full in the breast. Headlong the treacherous cup-bearer rolled in the roadway, and I heard him scream with terror and agony as the iron-shod hoofs stamped him into the dust.

On we tore up the street.

Bang! Bang! Bang! the muskets crackled behind us and the bullets sang swiftly by, dealing us no harm, but causing me to use my spurs more fiercely. Execrable marksmen as I knew the peasants of Lombardy to be, a chance bullet *might* get home.

With a mighty bound Cassius swept free of the houses. I rose in the saddle and pulled him down to a canter. No need for further racing on such a broiling day, I thought.

A moment later I found that I was mistaken. A rapid clatter of hoofs came from the village. Glancing over my shoulder I saw horsemen urging their beasts after me.

They were riding hard and gained on me at every jump.

Once more I slackened my pressure on the bit and moved upon my charger. Nobly he stretched to his work and bore me gallantly forward in the dusty sunshine. Rod upon rod, furlong upon furlong, mile upon mile slipped away, with Cassius still untiring, yet the roar of pursuit rose always in the rear, and it was still many miles to Lodi.

From time to time I turned in the saddle and noted the progress of those who followed me. They were not all equally well-horsed, as was soon evident from the separately rising dust puffs in the highway behind me.

Soon a great gap showed between the horseman who



led the chase and his comrades. Wider and wider the distance grew. I judged that he was gaining upon both me and them.

As he had the best steed, this rider was probably the leader. Might not his fall intimidate the rest and cause them to cease their pursuit? It was worth the finding out.

I drew down to a gallop, while he came rapidly nearer. Suddenly I wheeled and trotted toward him. He never drew bridle. A puff of smoke spouted in the dust-cloud that enveloped him. Another followed and to the report a pistol-ball whizzed through my shako. A dozen leaps of the mighty gray that carried him, and my pursuer was upon me, a stalwart, brawny-limbed, black-bearded young *bravo*, his white teeth showing set in a grin of hate, his eyeballs glaring fiercely through the dust, his right hand whirling a flashing broad-sword around his head!

Sharply I wrenched Cassius to the left and avoided the shock of his charge.

Cursing he aimed a sweeping side blow at my neck. I dropped upon my horse's mane, his blade passed over me, and I gave point with my own. The rush of the gray bore him full against my weapon and the hilt crashed hard upon his unguarded chest. The concussion of the blow wrenched my shoulder sadly and I was half unhorsed. But the gray sped onward without his rider.

He, flat on his back in the road, needed no second blow. A single glance showed me that.

Their leader's death had its effect upon those who rode in his track. The first, as he marked it, drew bridle at once and waited for the second. When the latter came up his arrival did not appear to bring sufficient courage to the pair to urge them on to where I sat, a pistol in either hand.

I waited for them, and yet they came not on. Cassius regained his wind the while. Then feeling that I had given him what rest I dared, I waved my hand in mocking adieu, wheeled and cantered away. They moved *then*; but only until they reached the body of their friend. Their chase was ended. I saw them take the homeward route.

For the rest of the way I rode warily. I avoided



every cluster of houses and held the highway only in the open country. I met with no more enemies, but an annoying accident later in the afternoon delayed me. My horse became dead lame, and I was forced to dismount and lead him. An advance in this fashion was slow and tedious. The sun had been hours below the horizon when I finally passed the outposts and limped along the streets of Lodi.

I wasted no time in searching for the regiment, but made straight for the *quartier général*, where I found it an easy matter to gain access to the Commander-in-Chief. In the early years of the Republic a private could seek his general without much ceremony.

Through a long room filled with officers busily urging their pens over paper upon tables, seats of chairs, drum-heads, even knapsacks, I was conducted to a smaller chamber where the only occupants were General Bonaparte and the Chief-of-Staff.

Both were bending over a large map rolled out upon a table, and the little Corsican was pushing his finger over its surface as he talked rapidly to the eagerly listening Berthier.

At my entrance they turned, eying me with impatience.

"What now?" sharply demanded the head of the army. "Do you bring news, *chasseur*?"

"A despatch for your own hand, *citizen général*," I answered, saluting and extending to him Tric-trac's billet.

He seized the paper, opened it and mastered its contents in one comprehensive glance. Then his cold eyes were looking me through and through.

"Ha! my old acquaintance, Corporal Luc, I see." The man never forgot a name or a face. "Where got you this missive? Be brief and explicit."

Rapidly I told of my meeting with Tric-trac upon the Pavia road.

"Have you told any one of the letter or the name of the sender?" he inquired almost before I had finished.

"No, *mon général*, I came with it direct to headquarters. I have spoken to none but the officer who brought me hither."

"*Bien fait!* While upon the road, marked you any signs that the country was disturbed?"



"They were sounding the tocsin, and an attempt was made to assassinate me, *citizen général*," I said, going on to recount the fruitless attack of the peasants.

"So you gave one of them the *coup-de-grace*? Again well done, young cockerel!" the general smiled.

"You can use your steel against others than comrades, it seems. You have done your duty well to-day. See that you follow the same path in the future. You may now rejoin your regiment. When you report to your captain, tell him that I have given you the grade of sergeant."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"SOME DAY HER BEAUTY MAY MAKE THEE TRAITOR."

THE bugles sounded the reveille long before daylight on the fourth of Prairial (May 24th). Scarce an hour elapsed from the time their brazen throats aroused our sleeping soldiers ere we were marching in haste along the road to Milan. Our regiment, a battalion of grenadiers and a battery of six guns, formed the column. Colonel Lannes had command of the whole, and with him rode General Bonaparte.

On the march Poignet d'Acier, riding by my side, insisted upon hearing the tale of my ride to Pavia. Frankly I gave him all the incidents of my journey, suppressing only the fact that I had met Tric-trac. When he learned that I had been face to face with Giacomo at Binasco and the innkeeper still drew the breath of life, Renaud Bronsard swore deep and long.

Toward evening we gained Milan, where we found that the insurrection in that quarter was already put down. The garrison of the citadel had made a sortie in aid of the peasantry, but our blockading division had driven them back. Pavia was in the hands of the insurgents. The troops were allowed some hours for rest, and then we fell into ranks again, marching for Binasco, where, reports said, the Italians had established an advanced post.

The morning was far advanced when we came in sight of the village, and the long line of the peasants



drawn up in the wide plain before it to bar our progress. The first squadron obliques to the right, the second to the left, and rode front into line, leaving space for the infantry to deploy between them. Within two hundred yards of them we came, and then the bugles signaled to halt. We sat quiet in our saddles, awaiting the arrival of the grenadiers.

Curiously I scanned the enemy. They were an unwarlike crew, though an attempt had been made to draw them up in military order. Though a great number had muskets, bayonets were few among them, and many bore farming implements, scythes, reaping-hooks and pickaxes. Here and there a rusty sword was to be seen in the crowd. Some carried only stilettoes. It was a shame to pit this wretched horde against veterans of the Army of Italy! Those who led them, frenzied with fanatic pride, thought otherwise.

At frequent intervals, in the rear of the undisciplined line, gallant cavaliers, better clad than the common herd, reined handsome chargers and brandished bright weapons as they shouted words of encouragement to the misguided hinds they had led forth to be slaughtered. Nobles of the country they were, agents of the Austrian government, stewards of the great landholders.

Priests, shovel-hatted and garbed in long *soutanes*, moved about among the ranks or passed slowly before them, bearing crucifixes on high while they called upon their parishioners to exterminate the French, enemies alike to God and man.

Shrill cries answered their exhortations, curses hurled at our soldiers and appeals to Heaven against us were heard from flank to flank. It was terrible and at the same time pitiable, that clamorous, confiding crowd!

Poignet d'Acier, looking straight ahead the while, muttered grimly between his set teeth, "*Tonnerre de ciel!* What do they think to do against us with such *canaille!* Cast eyes to the right, Georges, toward their center. Mark yon *polisson* on the great black beast who has just ridden clear of their front. Hast ever seen man or horse before?"

I looked, and immediately I recognized Count Luca, mounted on the charger I had seen ridden by him at the mountain inn.



"'Tis he, by all that's sacred!" I responded.

"Silence there!" called out the *chef d'escadron*.

The infantry marched up and formed, but the battery in their rear did not even unlimber. Small need would there be for grape and canister against the foes before us!

General Bonaparte and Colonel Lannes advanced a few rods to the front and scanned the Italians through their field-glasses. Count Luca put his horse in motion and rode toward them, waving a white handkerchief in the air; but the Colonel motioned him back, sending a pistol-bullet over his head as a sign that no parley would be permitted.

Our leaders appeared satisfied, wheeled their steeds and returned to the line of battle. I heard the notes of a rough voice shout some words, but what they were I could not catch. They ceased, and in response a thunderous "*Vive la République!*" rang from the grenadier battalion.

The drums rolled out the *pas de charge* and the grenadiers swept swiftly forward. Wild yells from the expectant peasants heralded their approach, musket-shots flashed along the edge of the mob, the air was filled with hoots and revilings. But the trained men in blue rushed sternly and silently on, never returning the fire and keeping a beautiful alignment, though here and there a ball went home and a soldier dropped.

They reached the enemy, who closed with them hand to hand. Presently among the other sounds we heard shrieks, screams of pain, and calls for mercy, telling that the bayonet was doing its deadly work. The Italians, untutored in warfare, but still full of fight, crowded toward their yielding center.

Our time had come.

The *chef d'escadron* gave the word and we came on at the trot. The distance was short and a few seconds brought us upon them. They met us with the courage of despair. The bugles sounded the gallop, and we rode in among them with loose bridles.

Crash! cut! slash! right and left, before and behind our sabers whizzed. They thronged around us at first and strove to tear us from our saddles. Comrade protected comrade on our part, skill made light work of undisciplined fury. Bludgeon and knife were no match



for our long weapons. The hoofs of our rearing, bounding chargers struck them down as they grasped at the bridles. Flesh and blood could not endure it. Into fragments we broke their formation and they scattered, fleeing wildly toward the village. Then began the butchery!

Cries for pardon were answered by the saber's edge.

I own now with little pride that I was in the thick of it, thrusting and striking with the foremost. But a mighty fear was on me. Aliandra might still be in the village. I must be *first* in that wild charge—to save her!

As the peasants neared the houses, I was heading the chase, a dozen leaps of my steed in rear of a knot of eight or ten of the fugitives. A powerful Italian, who towered head and shoulders above the rest, I noticed was looking over his shoulder at me from time to time as he ran. He carried a bright sword, a singular exception to his fellows, most of whom had thrown away their weapons.

Suddenly the man turned and made straight back at me, shouting to the others. They hesitated, then joined his rush. As for me, I spurred to meet him with a whoop of delight. For the reddened, rage-distorted face I had dreamed of often. It was Guisardo, son of Giacomo.

A pistol-shot rang out to my left, and the horse beneath me, pierced through the head, crashed dead to the earth, pinning me down by his weight upon my right thigh. Half-stunned I nevertheless rose on my elbow and struggled to drag myself free. Guisardo, yelling his triumph, was above me in an instant, his left hand grasping my shoulder, his right holding the sword's point to my throat.

"Ho! little devil with the angel's face, I have you again," he foamed, gnashing his teeth with savage satisfaction. "There is no *contessa* here to save you now, so away you go to the place where every French—"

A ball whizzed above me, and the brains of Guisardo splattered my face, as, relaxing his grasp, he tumbled in a heap beside me, stone dead. His comrades screamed and betook themselves once more to their heels as Poignet d'Acier dashed up, clutching his still smoking carbine.



The *maître d'armes* was out of the saddle in a moment and dragged me from under the lifeless carcase of my horse.

"Thanks, Renaud," I said. That was all. We knew each other, we two.

Together we hurried into the village where the grenadiers were still driving the peasants from house to house, and the clatter of musket-shots told the fate that our soldiers were dealing to the luckless inhabitants of Binasco. As a warning to the rest of Italy the order was given to fire the town, and already the flames were rising.

With all the speed I could manage we hastened to the house of Father Giulio. As we came to the door a tongue of fire burst from the roof and a column of smoke whirled aloft in the air.

Suddenly Poignet d'Acier cried: "*Parbleu!* a woman!" He saw Madame Teresa. She lay just within the door, where the bayonet had struck her down.

Her fate made me know what Aliandra's would also be. Wildly I flew through every room of the burning house, but, thank God, found no trace of the lady of my love, save a little kerchief that I placed upon my breast for memory of her. She must have left the village ere death came upon it.

The town of Binasco transformed into a cluster of blazing ruins, our soldiers gathered on the plain outside. Here a rest of several hours was given us, both that the men, fatigued by the long march of the morning, might make a meal and recruit their strength, and that the reports of the flying peasants together with the distant smoke of burning Binasco might strike terror to the hearts of those who had gathered to defy us at the city of Pavia.

We made good use of our period of repose, and when the column took up the march once more we pressed forward with redoubled vigor. Late in the afternoon we approached the old walls, relics of the middle ages, that still enclosed the place, which at that time could boast a population of over thirty thousand souls. A horde of armed peasants, numbering several thousands, had flocked in from the surrounding country, and the city was in their hands. To the pleadings and remonstrances of the good Archbishop of Milan, whom



our General had sent forward to persuade them to lay aside thoughts of resistance, they returned words of defiance and execration.

They manned the walls as we came near, prepared to perish under the eyes of their chiefs rather than allow us to enter. To carry such defenses with no more troops than a battalion of infantry and a regiment of horse was no trifling affair. Therefore our leader did not attempt it.

He knew full well the effect that ten or twelve hours of inaction would have upon the hastily-assembled, ill-assorted mob that was ranged against us. Popular uprisings lose force with every passing hour. A night spent in riotous patrolling of the streets would take much of the spirit out of the foe; even the troopers in our ranks knew *that*.

Our column retired to a safe distance from the ramparts, sentries were posted and as darkness fell the fires of our bivouacs sparkled on every side.

Our suppers disposed of, Poignet d'Acier drew me aside from the rest of our mess to chat over a confidential pipe.

"Dost know, Georges, that was a narrow miss thou hadst of it to-day," he began. "There is a limit to all things, Georges, and 'twas no proof of wisdom in thee to be ten lengths ahead of the squadron."

But my thoughts were elsewhere. "Renaud," I said, after we had smoked awhile in silence, "what is it that makes the aristocrats so different from other folk? Might—might it not after all be a fine thing to belong to them?"

"*Sacre!* who put that thought into thy head?" and the *maître d'armes* stared at me suspiciously.

"Oh, no one," I said lamely, "I but wondered—"

"To the devil with such wonderings!" he retorted testily. "Would'st be such a one as Count Luca?"

"*Peste!* You seem to have Count Luca on your cut-and-thrust brain, Poignet d'Acier?" I jeered, for I liked not the mention of this man whom Aliandra regarded with such esteem.

"*Sapristi!* On my brain now, but some day I'll have this Conti di Luca upon my saber. I know to an inch when I am going to send my point home. I see by your face you have an idea in your head about him



also ; but, my boy, you must promise me to leave Count Luca to my sword."

"Yes," I answered moodily, "if I killed her cousin she might not—"

Here I bit my tongue for the *maître d'armes* was gazing at me, a grim smile rippling the scar upon his cheek.

Finally he burst out : " 'Love me ?' that's what thou wast going to say. *Dame !* the boy is looking high. La Contessa is one of the greatest heiresses in Piedmont. Bah ! *Monsieur le Sergent, Mademoiselle la Vivandière* is better mate for thee. Wed her and breed Frenchmen, not half-bloods. Beware the beauty of this Lady of the Mountains. Some day her charms may make thee traitor to *la République !*" Then the anger died out of his voice, and he muttered contemplatively, "And yet, it is not strange ! Like seeks like—*Noblesse* will turn to noble blood."

"What mean you by those words, Poignet d'Acier ?" I cried, a wild kind of a hope springing in my heart.

My hand was on his arm, my eyes were full of question ; but the *maître* shook me off, laughing lightly, almost sneeringly : "*Sapristi !* would you have me spoil the making of a general ?" and strode to another camp-fire where the bizarre and familiar figures of Tric-trac and his ape were surrounded by admiring *chasseurs*.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE TALE OVER THE CAMP-FIRE.

With a muttered curse I followed Bronsard.

The juggler waved us a merry greeting as he caught sight of us.

"A fair good-evening to my old friends, citizens Poignet d'Acier and Sans-barbe," he called out.

"And whence did you come, friend Tric-trac ?" demanded Poignet d'Acier as the mountebank paused.

"Oh ! from the city, from Pavia yonder, *Sacre !* 'tis no place for me at present for one in my trade. Messieurs the citizens Italian are just now too busy flour-



ishing their own knives about, to care to watch while I play with mine."

"So the peasants will fight to-morrow?" I remarked.

"Fight? *Sang-dieu!* Will they do anything else? They are here for no other purpose," the juggler declared. "Since the sun went down and your column retired, for want of other adversaries they are fighting each other. Your friend Count Luca is of their number, citizen Sans-Barbe."

"Friend?" I ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, yours, my little *chasseur-à-cheval*. You've roused the *sentiment* of the Count Luca. He has not forgotten the fashion in which you trussed him up and rolled him under the table when you carried off his despatches. And, besides, it seems that he fancies a certain pair of dark eyes have looked too much on your blue ones. Ha! ha! by the Republic! but he may have good reason! See the little citizen color up!" Tric-trac laughed.

"I am not blushing, Tric-trac, 'tis but the blaze of the fire," I protested furiously.

"Never take shame if the blood *does* come to your cheeks, Sans-barbe," the juggler answered, suddenly ceasing his guffaws and regarding me with a kindly glance. "It tells of a warm and generous spirit, that same mantling color."

Suddenly I voiced a fear that was uppermost in my brain.

"Tell me," I asked, "is the Lady Aliandra now in that city? Where has she taken lodgings if she be yet in Pavia? Women will fare hardly in to-morrow's assault, and I will protect *her* against even the Commander-in-chief!"

"*Parbleu!* but I believe you would!" Tric-trac rejoined with a smile at my eager tone. "She'll give you no chance to enact the *chevalier* to-morrow, Sans-barbe. Count Luca saw to it that the Lady Aliandra left Pavia before he set out for Binasco. Having done her part she is far on her way back to the mountains by this time."

I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I asked curiously, "What part?"

"Roused the peasants to strike for Italy! They believe in her—her beauty, and her rank make them



think her an Italian Joan of Arc. But now I've bestowed enough of my valuable conversation on you, my friend, and must give a share of my talents to our comrades here. Attention, Agricola! *Apprenez armes!*" and Tric-trac tossed the club to the ape.

I heaved a mighty sigh. What would Bonaparte decree to this lovely girl when he had destroyed the peasants that rose at her inspiring.

When the well-entertained *sabreurs* had lounged back to their own messes Tric-trac and the ape settled themselves to pass the night with us. Agricola seemed to conceive a sudden strong fancy to me, waddling over to a seat on the ground at my side, nestling close to me, and allowing me to pet him with evident pleasure. I was by no means ill-pleased to be singled out thus for attention by the accomplished monkey. So I stroked his hairy hide, tried to converse with him by nods, grunts and smiles, and made much of him in every way.

The hour grew late. One by one the troopers around us rolled themselves in their blankets and fell asleep. Soon even Poignet d'Acier was snoring, and none remained awake but Tric-trac and myself; we two puffing at our pipes, the ape rubbing his great head against my shoulder as I stared dreamily into the fire.

The mountebank rose cautiously and moved his position to one on my free side, taking care not to disturb my slumbering comrades.

"I see, citizen Sans-barbe, that you carry a pair of sergeant's chevrons here now," he whispered, rubbing his finger along my sleeve. "'Tis evident that you did my errand, and carried the *billet* I gave you safe to the Little Corporal."

Slowly I turned my eyes and met his glance.

"What *billet*? what errand do you speak of?" I murmured in cool surprise.

"What *billet*? Why, the one I gave you the day before yesterday, after you escaped from the priest's house. *Nom d'un nom!* why do you stare at me so blankly? Is the boy mad!"

"Tric-trac," I whispered calmly back, "you have been dreaming, my friend. Such a *billet* and such a meeting with you I cannot recall. You know as well



as I do that I have never set eyes on you since the night when first we met."

"Not even when I directed you to the house of the good Father Giulio in Binasco?" he suggested maliciously, his eyes full of insinuation.

"Not even then," I returned imperturbably. "That also must be a part of your dream. You must be careful, comrade, such spells are bad for one's health. Take my advice and cease dreaming."

"*Par la barbe de mon pere!* young soldier, you are no fool!" the juggler grinned. "'Tis plain that you have had some experience with the General Bonaparte!"

"If I have, I have profited enough by it never to recollect dreams, *Tric-trac*," was my low-voiced answer.

"Right! You are to be trusted, I see, even though you are so young. Before you slumber there are a few things I would tell you," the mountebank urged. "You paid but little heed to my warnings earlier in the evening. Believe me, they were earnestly uttered. I have a liking for you, *Sans-barbe*, and it is the stronger since *Agricola* has shown that he feels toward you as I do. The ape is never deceived in a man and I rely greatly on his judgment. Citizen *Sans-barbe*, I tell you once more, 'ware the Count Luca Campogiacinto."

"You seem to have an accurate knowledge of the Count Luca, *Tric-trac*," I observed some what curiously. "One would suppose that you have made the man a study."

"Aye, that I have," rejoined the mountebank with a vicious gritting of his teeth. "No man in Italy has caused so many of his schemes to come to nothing."

I bent toward him, my interest fully aroused.

"Why, what lies between you and yon Sardinian captain?" I asked.

"Well, Citizen *Sans-barbe*," whispered the juggler after a moment's consideration, "since you wish my story, here it is. It may throw some light on matters you've wondered at since you've made the acquaintance of that singular pair of friends, myself and *Agricola*."

"Had you met me twelve years ago," he continued, "you had not seen the homeless, wandering vagabond you know to-day. Captain of a stout felucca



with a crew of jolly sea-dogs devoted to my interests, I drove a prosperous trade between Naples and Marseilles. Every voyage brought me profit, and if I *did* load the greater part of *La belle Marie's* hold with a contraband cargo, the officers of the revenue were blind, as was to their advantage. I was growing rich and thinking of retiring and building for myself a mansion by the bay of Naples where I could take my ease in the world, when I met a woman whom I worshiped at sight.

"She was far below me in station, the daughter of a wretchedly impoverished shopkeeper. Indeed, it chanced that he had brought her to the house of one of my *patrons*, a rich merchant to whom he owed money, in the hope that a sight of her beauty and her tears would incline my friend to grant him longer time for payment. I saw her there, and two days after I paid her father's debts. A week later she became my wife. Ah, young *chasseur*, that was a happy time for me!

"She could not bear the thought of leaving Naples, and so to please her I purchased a handsome villa there. Nothing was spared to make it suitable for her. I gave her dresses and jewels, more such than she had ever dreamed of. For she was very beautiful, my Julie, no woman in Italy could equal her in face or form. And I loved her, my God! how I loved her! All that she desired I procured for her; it was my delight to forestall her slightest wish.

"To live in this fashion made my continuing to follow the sea imperative. Thus I was often absent from home for long periods. But in the intervals between my voyages the fondness of my wife repaid me for the perils that I dared by sea.

"But why dwell on my fool's paradise. For such it was. My wife had never loved me. I was for her merely an escape from a life of poverty and privation. While I was at sea, time hung heavy on her hands and she sought amusement. She found it in the society of a young noble, a scion of an old Piedmontese family, who came to Naples with his father.

"I returned from the last voyage I ever made to find my house empty and my wife gone. She had fled with the Count Luca Campogiacinto.



"Scarcely had I comprehended what had befallen my happiness when a new misfortune struck me down. I was seized by the officers of the customs and cast into prison. The young fiend who had stolen my wife wanted money also. He knew that I was reported wealthy, and from my wife he had learned of my smuggling pursuits. My possessions were confiscated and half the sum went to the informer, Count Luca!

"After three years of imprisonment, Sans-barbe, I escaped. God heard my prayers and presented the opportunity, which I was not slow to seize.

"Free once more, I sought for Count Luca. He had heard of my being at large and was on his guard. Three times I barely missed falling a victim to the assassins he employed to make away with me. Their fourth attempt was more successful. Sans-barbe, you are looking at a man who has been *dead* some years."

"*Parbleu!*" I said, as Tric-trac paused to grin at me. "So far as I can observe you are an excessively well-preserved corpse."

"Aye, that I am!" the mountebank swore with an oath that was all the more terrible when heard in the suppressed tones we were using. "Though the Count Luca fully believes me to be no more among the living, he was cheated by his bravos. I took advantage of it and he ceased to fear a *dead* man. To Marseilles I repaired and there I secured Agricola from a friend to whom I had given the ape before my marriage. The brute was always fond of me, as I had been his master almost from his infancy. Amateur work of the juggling sort I had been in the habit of practising to while away time on shipboard. To train Agricola was hard, but I accomplished it. That once done I had a safe disguise, and to Italy I returned. For five years, Citizen Sans-barbe, I have taken a pleasure in thwarting and bringing to naught every scheme conceived by Count Luca Campogiacinto."

"*Diable!*" I broke in, "but I cannot understand that. In your place I should have killed him off-hand!"

"What! without paying back to him the despair and suffering he had caused me? No, no, Sans-barbe, that were a poor revenge! Mine has been sweeter than that, and for some months now I have tasted its



delights almost daily. For, Sans-barbe, strange as you may think it, Count Luca knows me and *trusts* me; not as the man he wronged, of course, but as Tric-trac the juggler. He got into money troubles soon after the old count, his father, died, and I showed him a way out of them by pushing him tight and fast into the clutches of the Austrians. Through me he accepted the gold of Austria, who paid well her agents to start this insurrection of the peasants. Be sure that I watched every step in the preparations, Sans-barbe, and that the part Count Luca has taken is well known at headquarters."

"But your wife, Tric-trac? what of her?" I demanded suddenly.

"Julie is no more," the mountebank returned in sad accents. "Luca grew tired of her and forsook the woman he had led astray. Friendless and despairing she died two years ago in a brothel at Milan."

"*Sacré nom!*" I muttered, glaring at the fire.

"You understand now, young *chasseur*, why I take so great an interest in Count Luca," the juggler resumed. "You will not be surprised when I tell you that I seek him often to draw from him his projects and then to accomplish that they shall miscarry. He wishes to mend his broken fortunes by a marriage with his cousin, the *Contessa* Aliandra, but she—Hold! it is no business of mine or of yours either, *that* part. Sufficient to say, I had a finger in the pie, and Count Luca has not gotten her yet, nor will he ever!"

"But, Tric-trac," I observed, "here is something that puzzles me. Why, if the Lady Aliandra detests the Count Luca—why, I say, was she with him the other day at Binasco?"

"In a *dream* only, you mean, Sans-barbe," the old fellow said dryly, "you must be careful, my friend. Dreaming is a bad habit."

I laughed as I saw how neatly he had turned the tables on me.

"As to the Lady Aliandra," Tric-trac went on, "be sure that every act of hers is pure and noble. *She* is an angel. I would shed my blood for her at any time. Count Luca is the only one of the Campogiacintos toward whom I cherish feelings of revenge. After to-morrow he will be a fugitive with a price set



upon his head. *I* have attended to that. The Little Corporal has his name many times over among his memoranda. Proscribed in Piedmont, Naples, and Lombardy, the Count will have to take up the life of a wild beast. 'Twill be but a few weeks ere he is hunted down and destroyed. And *I* shall be there *at the end.*"

The mountebank ceased, and though I spoke to him twice he seemed absorbed in deep thought and I refrained from disturbing him farther. Tired and drowsy, I pulled my blanket about my shoulders and stretched out at full length on the ground. Sleep soon closed my eyes, and their last waking glance rested on the figure of Tric-trac still staring moodily into the fire, lost to all else but his dream of vengeance.

The next day, we captured and sacked Pavia and put the insurrection of the peasants on the plains of Lombardy to a bloody yet immediate end.



## BOOK III.

### A MODERN JOAN OF ARC

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#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### THE DANCER FAVORITA.

THE rising of the insurgents had delayed the opening of our campaign, and bitterly we made them repent that they had retarded our movements against the Austrians. But time was passing and our army on the Oglio River sadly needed the Commander-in-chief. So we marched away to rejoin it at last, leaving desolation and death to mark our passage through those smiling Italian plains.

On our reaching Lodi, I recovered my good charger Cassius whom I found entirely cured of his lameness. The old brute showed delight at seeing me again, and I confess that I was glad to be once more upon his back.

A reinforcement of ten thousand men that had been sent to him from Germany had restored the confidence of the Austrian General Beaulieu. With his forces thus strengthened, he had ventured to leave the Tyrol and had advanced to occupy the line of the Mincio. Beyond that stream he had stationed his main body in Valeggio, supporting it by a strong reserve at Villa Franca. Again our little Corsican commander befooled his aged opponent. Desiring to cross the Mincio at Borghetto and Valeggio he employed once more the very tactics that had won for us the passage of the Po. One of our divisions moved



upon Peschiera, while another threatened Lonato. Beaulieu was thus led to believe that the Army of Italy would endeavor to effect a crossing on the upper Mincio or even try to turn the Lake of Garda. Under this impression he took his measures to defeat us and fell blindly into the trap prepared for him.

On the 9th of Prairial (May 29th) our squadron advanced upon the plains before Borghetto. Up to this day the cavalry of the army had never been able to claim the renown deservedly accorded to the infantry and artillery. Our reputation was far below that of the Austrian horsemen, to whom, many of our generals contended, we could not be successfully opposed.

But General Bonaparte had his own ideas on the subject. Placing strong bodies of grenadiers upon either flank, he supported us in the rear by artillery and hurled us in full career at the famous troopers of Austria. Murat led on our charge. Murat, that beau-ideal of a dashing *sabreur*, that black-whiskered, swarthy, long-ringletted light-horseman, whose towering plume of white feathers was to sweep so resistlessly in after years over the broken wrecks of mightier armies than we ever dreamed of then. As yet, he was but a colonel of hussars, an aide-de-camp to the general.

He rode in advance of us that day, and, following him, we met the charging enemy blade to blade, and fought them well, and tamed their German pride, and beat them soundly in the level lands there by Borghetto.

When they broke at last and coursed away with their bloody spurs buried deep in the flanks of their flying steeds, to seek the protection of their supporting infantry, a cheer wild and joyous as any I have ever joined in burst from the throats of our conquering cavalymen. We felt that we were worthy to belong to the Army of Italy.

The musketry of our footmen presently echoed through the streets of Borghetto as they drove the troops of the Emperor Francis from the town. As the Austrians fled they destroyed an arch of the bridge. But what mattered that to troops like ours? General Gardanne, with a body of grenadiers, rushed into the river. Holding their muskets above their heads, they gained the farther shore. The dispirited foe could not



manage to drive them back. The bridge was repaired, and the passage of the Mincio was won.

His line thus forced, Beaulieu again retired upon the Tyrol.

In the *mêlée* at Borghetto I fortunately chanced to receive upon the guard of my saber a descending Austrian blade, whose owner intended that it should reach the head of Colonel Billot. Old "*Bouche de feu*" gave me no word of thanks at the time. On the contrary, he swore vigorously because the shoulder of Cassius pressed hard against his thigh. But he did not forget me, for all that, and showed his appreciation of what I had done in a way that to me was far more gratifying than a courteous speech. On the day following the action he promoted me to the grade of company-sergeant. He knew well what sort of thanks pleases a soldier, the tiger-eyed colonel of the regiment Damremont.

That gallant body of men and horses did not participate in the pursuit of the Kaiserlicks.

While the rest of the army pressed untiringly in the rear of Beaulieu's flying forces, we returned by easy marches to Milan. There we halted for some days, awaiting orders from headquarters, though all of us wondered that we were not immediately despatched to quell the disorders that had arisen in the states of Genoa and Piedmont and the imperial fiefs.

For, while General Bonaparte was engaged in thrashing Beaulieu, trouble was rife along the whole extent of our lines of communication and supply. A great number of the nobles, sympathizing with the Austrians, and lightly held by the fact that their nations were at peace with the Republic, took the field against us. Among them were many officers from the Sardinian army that we had compelled to an armistice when first we entered Italy. They gathered bands recruited from their own vassals, from the deserters of both French and Austrians, and from the desperate banditti of the mountains. With these men they attacked our convoys, assassinated our couriers, kept back our convalescents who were *en route* from France to rejoin their regiments, and made the paths of the Apenines unsafe for any of our detachments, except those of unusual strength.



The Genoese, Roman and Sardinian governments seemed powerless to stop their outrages, and every day brought to Milan its tale of the defeat and extermination of small bodies of our soldiers. The cruelty and daring of many of the chiefs of these *Barbets*, as they called them, was constantly talked of throughout the whole city. Prominent among the names I heard mentioned for success and brutality was that of Count Luca Campogiacinto.

On the morning of the third day after the regiment's arrival at Milan, being off duty, I took advantage of the occasion to stroll about the streets of the city and display before the admiring eyes of the Milanese ladies a new green uniform, fresh from the hands of the regimental tailor, that fitted me without a wrinkle. The consciousness of wearing a perfectly-setting coat always gives a man an excellent opinion of himself. Particularly when the coat is adorned across the front with bars of heavy white corded braid, fetchingly looped beneath the numerous bright buttons. You can well imagine, then, after what fashion I swaggered, giving all the prominence in my power to the gay chevrons that I, one of the most youthful sergeants in the army, was so proud to wear.

Happening to be opposite the great cathedral for which the city is so justly celebrated, I stopped in my sauntering progress, hesitated for a few moments, and then entered, hoping for a sight of those great treasures that Poignet d'Acier had feelingly recounted to me. They were not on view that day, and I wandered slowly through the long aisles of that mighty building, wondering at its magnificent proportions. After a time I blundered into a part of the church where a priest, standing before a crowd of kneeling devotees, mostly women, was conducting some sort of a religious service.

Moved by a sudden strange impulse I did not turn back, but advanced and knelt among the worshipers. As to what the ceremony was I had not the faintest idea. Mass, angelus or vespers were all one to those who marched beneath the tricolor. But the solemn tones of the good father's voice brought back to me almost forgotten memories of my childhood and recalled the lovely woman I had seen perish under the



guillotine. Therefore I remained, maintaining the same reverent attitude with the others.

Presently I awoke to the fact that I was an object of more than ordinary interest to the rest of the congregation. Eyes were turned curiously in my direction, and I noticed several of those who should have been absorbed in the service nudge their neighbors and direct their attention toward me. Truly it was no wonder that they stared, for to see a *chasseur-à-cheval* in a church was almost incredible—except when he sought the edifice to stable his charger there.

Among the eyes that gazed thus on me with wondering regard I marked a pair that fixed my attention on the instant. Great brown orbs they were, melting and languishing, with a world of passion smouldering in their velvety depths. There are certain men who can never resist the temptation to look long and admiringly into beautiful feminine eyes. The flashes that shoot from them always play great havoc in their hearts. And such a man I have always been. *Jarni-bleu!* A many of the sex can boast that they have had easy conquest of the affections of trooper Sans-barbe!

So I stared and stared, my own blue eyes growing greater and greater with every second, I have no doubt. All at once the thought struck me that my action was undeniably rude. Swiftly I fastened my look on the stone pavement, while I felt the ready blood mantle in my cheeks. 'Tis a most inconvenient habit to possess, that one of blushing! Many a trying affair it has brought upon me that otherwise I would have been able to avoid. Some men there have been who, mistaking the fact that the color comes readily to my face for an indication of a diffident and retiring temperament, have presumed upon it. And I have been obliged to convince them of their error.

Though my eyes I kept directed to the floor, they *would* endeavor to turn toward the spot where the owner of the brown ones knelt. After some seconds I ventured to cast a hasty glance at her.

She was still regarding me, and as I met her gaze, a smile lighted up her beautiful features and made her lovely southern face adorable. That smile and the dazzling radiance of the look that accompanied it did for me completely, I turned redder than before, but I



flashed back a stare that must have taught the lady that though I could blush I was still a *chasseur-à-cheval*.

For the remainder of the service I paid no attention to the words of the priest. All of my thoughts were centered upon the charming unknown. Blue eyes sought brown with persevering constancy. At times brown flew swiftly away and avoided them, at others they dwelt long upon blue, and their ardent glances conveyed a host of tender meanings. With the parting "amen" blue rose to his booted feet and gathered up his saber with the firm intention of speaking to brown immediately.

She did not give me the chance. I entered the aisle to depart in advance of her, and made my pace terribly slow in order to allow her to come abreast of me. But she swept quickly past with a swish of silken skirts about her dainty little feet. As she went by she turned her head and smiled into my face again, at the same time giving me a warning and negative nod. Another woman, much older and not so well clad, walked beside her.

I followed them to the street, determined not to miss finding out where she dwelt. But after my *ingénue* had taken some fifty steps in the open air she looked back and noted my pursuit. Again she smiled and shook her head to forbid my chase, laying a finger upon her enchanting lips in sign of caution.

A knot of young Italians attired in the height of the prevailing mode, who had parted with low reverences to allow her to pass, did not fail to mark her gesture, and as I came to a halt I found a dozen hostile and disdainful glances fixed upon me.

I returned the stares with hearty good-will, and squaring my shoulders I was about to move haughtily away when one of the Milanese spoke to his companions in a tone that he plainly intended that I should catch.

"*Corpo di San Marco!*" he observed with a supercilious sneer. "The assurance of these foreign French dogs is wonderful. Here is one who evidently imagines himself back among the *dames de la Halle* of Paris. It is almost enough to cause one to take in hand the imparting of the lessons the Austrians should have taught them."



I turned on my heel and walked directly up to him. "If the manners of Frenchmen be bad, *signor*," I said calmly in Italian, "we are always open to instruction. Would it please you to offer the same in my case?"

"You have mistaken your degree, *citizen*," he returned contemptuously. "Did you wear an epaulet it were a matter of another color; but as it is I cannot play the pedagogue."

"True, Rossoviconti," one of his friends chimed in. "The nobles of Milan have not yet sunk to the schooling of French *sous-officiers*."

They both spoke in the language of France, and their manner was offensively insulting.

"I thank you both, *messieurs*," I rejoined with a smile. "You remind me that a soldier of the Army of Italy should be above regarding the words of mere *lazzaroni*."

My speech had its effect, as I had intended it should. They grew furious in a moment and speedily all question of rank was laid aside. Before we parted a meeting was arranged for that very evening.

The affair came off at sunset, Poignet d'Acier, who accompanied me to the ground, had been making inquiries concerning my opponent during the afternoon. From him I learned that the man who had affronted me was a leading spirit among the *jeunesse dorée* of the city, an arbiter of their amusements and their fashions, of considerable experience in affairs of honor, and a scion of one of the noblest and wealthiest families in Milan. They gave him a magnificent and imposing funeral two days later.

As we were returning to our quarters the *maître d'armes* suddenly asked,

"I suppose you know the name of the woman who caused the matter, Georges?"

"Not I," I carelessly replied. "Besides, Renaud, her name has nothing to do with it."

"Hasn't it?" he laughed. "Perhaps not, but it may cause the duel to be widely talked of."

"Who was she then?" I demanded.

"La Favorita," Poignet d'Acier answered with a meaning grin.

"La Favorita!" I echoed in surprise.



"None other, my boy, I can assure you. I learned that this afternoon while attending to the preliminaries. Signor Rossoviconti had more reason than you dreamed of for resenting your pursuit of her, for they say he was madly enamored of the beautiful dancer, as is also, according to common report, a certain citizen of the Republic with whom you have had dealings. Best have a care, Georges; 'tis no wise thing to hunt with the eagle."

"*Par Dieu!* Renaud Bronsard," I said haughtily. "I hunt where I please, and I have as much right to this chase as Buonaparte himself, aye, more."

"Without doubt, my boy, and you have no need to tell *me* so. But thy father's son has not at his disposal the millions of Italy. Money counts for much with most women. Furthermore it is not prudent to spell the general's name as they do in Corsica. The *u* has gone out of fashion since Montenotte."

"And so that was La Favorita," I broke in. "What they say of her does little justice to her beauty, Renaud. *Hein!* but she is a divinity, that woman."

"Therefore she's sought by the gods, and a sergeant of light-horse should make haste to put her out of his thoughts," Poignet d'Acier warned me, giving me an affectionate tap on the shoulder.

Despite the words of the *maître-d'armes* I could not banish from my brain the vision of the adorable woman of the cathedral. Her name I knew well. I had heard many stories of her beauty, extravagance, and caprice in matters of love. An idol of the populace of Milan she was, a *danseuse* of the opera, whose lithe grace and beauteous countenance had endeared her to the hearts of the Italians and brought lovers in scores to her agile little feet. Among the soldiers it was current that many of our highest ranking officers had gone wild about her, and were lavishing upon her the gold they had earned amid the roar of the cannon.

Surrounded as she was by the attentions of those great men, I knew that there could be but little chance that she would bestow a second thought upon Sergeant Luc. Nevertheless, as I rolled uneasily upon my couch that night, I could not keep from thinking of those liquid, passionate brown eyes. With the vanity of youth I could not quite bring myself to believe my



cause hopeless. And I wondered when and how I could manage to see her again.

The next day put an end to my uncertainty. Early in the morning a ragged little imp of a Milanese street urchin thrust a small, delicately scented bit of paper into my hand and hurried away before I could think to detain him.

Opening the billet I found that it was worded thus.

*“If you are as enterprising with Love as you are skilful with the sword, be at the door by which you left the cathedral yesterday at half an hour after nine o’clock to-night.”*

That was all; but it was sufficient to set me ablaze with anticipation. I sought Captain Mirador at once. Strict and punctilious performance of my duty had gained me my officer’s favor. It was easy then for me to obtain from him a twelve hours’ leave of absence to begin at sundown. The rest of the day I passed in a fever of excitement. Never had I known the hours to drag by so slowly.

In an affair of the kind that I counted upon there was small likelihood that any danger could threaten me. All the same we were in the midst of a foreign and not wholly friendly people. I judged it best, then, to leave my quarters well prepared to guard my life. Old Nicholas Mauran, who was very fond of me, had some days before solemnly made me a present of a small, beautifully finished pistol that could be easily carried in one’s pocket. This weapon I loaded and primed very carefully, and thrust it into the breast of my jacket. Thus armed, with my saber at my side, of course, our troopers never thinking of laying aside *that* weapon, I felt amply competent to take care of myself.

I was hovering about the cathedral some minutes ahead of the appointed time. As the clocks of the city chimed the half-hour a figure wrapped in an ample cloak of dark cloth approached me and seized my wrist.

“*Venez,*” it said in French, and I knew from the voice that the mantle held a woman. Without hesitation I followed her guidance.

Down the street she hurried me for a couple of blocks,



then turned to the left and urged me on more rapidly, hastening along the Corso di Porta Romana.

Presently we left the street and passed into the hall of a tall, gloomy-appearing mansion whose sullen front gave forth no ray of light to indicate that human beings dwelt there.

Across this hall and up the wide staircase of marble that led to the second floor my guide led me so swiftly that I had no chance to take note of the surroundings. The only article I marked was a bronze statue of Cupid that stood at the foot of the stairs, holding a lamp with a rose-colored shade above his curly head. After we reached the story above we turned to the right and made some steps along a hallway that was dimly and uncertainly illuminated by a great lamp with low-turned wick that hung from the ceiling at its entrance.

A pair of heavy curtains barred our progress. My guide parted them and pushed me forward, halting at the same time and closing their velvet folds behind me. I took a step forward, then stood still, almost dazzled by the brilliant glare of light that had succeeded to the dusk of the hall.

I had entered a boudoir possessing a wealth of luxury in its appointments that up to that time I had never before witnessed. The room was built in the form of an octagon. Directly opposite to me a huge mirror of Venetian glass occupied one entire side, reaching from floor to ceiling. To its right, as I faced it, the wall was painted in a brilliant-hued fresco of Jupiter and Europa. The next division depicted a superb Leda with the swan in her lap. To her succeeded Danaë lying in the golden shower. Behind me a thick portière of dark blue velvet concealed the door through which I had come. On the wall beyond it a jolly satyr peered through a screen of thickets at a beautiful woman who lay asleep amid clustering flowers of the forest. The two remaining panels were covered by portières of blue velvet lined with gold, like the one I have before described. That to the left of the mirror was tightly closed. Through the open folds of the other I could see the voluptuous adornments and snowy couch of a brilliantly lighted bedroom.

A thick velvet carpet, likewise dark blue, covered the



floor. On the ceiling a host of laughing Bacchantes danced and frolicked with rosy, golden-haired cupids. Luxurious arm-chairs stood about and there was a great sofa, all upholstered in blue velvet. In the center of the room a small table held a dainty supper for two; long-necked straw-wrapped flasks stood upon its cloth of damasked linen and in addition I recognized several bottles of our own *vin de champagne*. Not that I cared greatly for *them*. Burgundy is the wine I relish. But seen here by the side of the shining china and polished silver it made one feel that he was among friends.

All these beautiful things I had little time to wonder over. Through the curtains of the sleeping apartment my divinity of the cathedral, the lovely Favorita, came swiftly to greet me, holding out both her hands. Beside her the magnificence of the room sunk into nothing. *Sapristi!* How grand was the loveliness of that woman!

The masses of her abundant brown hair were rolled high on her head and held in place by clasps that blazed with jewels. Great diamonds flashed in her little ears, a necklace of the same precious gems flamed about her snowy throat that needed not their gleams to enhance its beauty. Her eyes shone like twin stars, her scarlet, full-lipped mouth curved in an enchanting smile that formed bewitching dimples in her soft cheeks. A laugh of satisfaction she gave as she extended to me her small, rose-tipped fingers, revealed two rows of even, beautifully white teeth.

Apparently she had just come from the theater, for she wore her costume of the ballet, a sleeveless, low-necked bodice of glistening silk displaying in all their glory the matchless charms of her magnificent shoulders, her chest, broad, full, dazzling as polished marble, and nigh half the proportions of her glowing bosom. Bracelets of Venetian gold were clasped upon the firm, rounded arms in whose embrace the joys of Paradise might well be held of little value compared to those they promised.

The skirt of gauze, creamy white, with the folds of its gossamer fabric accentuated rather than concealed the curves of those limbs that in their flashing silken tights never failed to draw forth the enthusiastic "*bravas*" of all who saw her dance. Thus Favorita



came to me, a living, breathing incarnation of all the charms that can allure the senses. Before her intoxicating presence my brain reeled, the world for the time held for me this woman alone.

And yet she did not touch my heart. Even as she crossed the floor a swift remembrance of the Lady Aliandra stirred within me, a sense of the boundless superiority possessed by the simply-clad, virtuous girl who had preserved my life at the risk of her own reputation, but a few evenings previous, over the sensuously handsome, wondrously radiant Southern woman whose great brown eyes now rested so kindly upon my enraptured face.

The *contessa* had repelled the love of the peasant. As I remembered that, the fingers of La Favorita clasped my hands. At their touch the blood coursed in my veins like liquid fire and I forgot all else save her.

"At last you have come, my gallant little *sabreur*," she cried. "Ah! how eagerly I have looked for you!"

I gave her no reason to think that I had not been impatient also. A thorough *chasseur* I was that night!

"Those kisses will do beautifully for the present," the lady observed at length with a merry peal of laughter. "Let me give you some supper now. O, I know how to appeal to the hearts of men, especially soldiers. The nearest pass is always through their stomachs."

In vain I protested that I was not hungry. She forced me into a chair at the table, heaped my plate with viands and filled my glass to the brim.

"There!" she cried after she had helped herself with much greater moderation. "Now we are comfortably situated and we can talk at our leisure as we eat. You did not suspect, at this hour last night, how soon you would be the guest of La Favorita, did you?"

"Frankly, I did not dare to hope for such happiness," I returned. "Though I lay awake for many hours and found it impossible to sleep for thoughts of you."

"You would not believe me if I told you that I had the same experience," she said slowly. "But never-



theless it is true. Your face of an angel affected me strangely when I saw it in the cathedral, with its golden hair and great blue eyes. I like your eyes, they are very handsome, I can tell you."

"To speak of yours, *signorina*, I feel would be a vain task for me to attempt," I answered. "I could not find fitting words."

"Don't attempt it then," she smiled. "Let us rather talk of yourself. "Ah, but you are a charming boy! and I know that you and I are going to be great friends. You will come to see me very often?"

"As often as you will permit me, *signorina*," I said warmly. "My only fear is that you will grow tired of seeing me."

"You need not dread that, my gallant little *chasseur*," she retorted. "My heart has conceived a feeling for you that I cannot explain, it is so singular. For you are but a boy, after all, with your smooth face and innocent expression. Who to look at you would think for a moment that *you* killed Rossoviconti?"

"You know that, then, *signorina*?" I demanded.

"Of course. The fool came here every day and I was tired to death of his visits. It was a relief not to see his face this morning. You must have had a fine instructor in your rapier play. They used to call Rossoviconti one of the best in the schools of Milan."

"There are fair swordsmen among the soldiers of France, *signorina*," I said modestly.

"You say that as if their equals could not be found," she laughed. "Don't deceive yourself, my young fire-eater. There are fencers in Italy before whom the best of your army would lower his crest."

"As yet I have not heard of them, *signorina*," I observed. "Where are they to be found?"

"One of them you may stand some chance of meeting soon, for I hear that your regiment is to be sent against the Barbets. If that happens, my friend, avoid a certain one of their leaders, for my sake. If you would not have me go into mourning, and I *should* do that if you died, shun the Count Luca Campogiacinto."

"Count Luca!" I exclaimed. "What! is the man of your acquaintance, *signorina*?"

"Indeed, I know him very well," laughed La Favo-



rita. "His name seems familiar to you also. What do you know of him?"

"We have met," I smiled. "As for keeping clear of him I have already promised that. I gave my word to a man whom it will be decidedly unhealthy for the count to meet."

"You mean?" Her face became eager as she bent forward for my reply.

"Simply that one of the best men that ever handled sword has sworn to have a bout with the Count Luca. The count will never tell of the affair, *signorina*."

"Then you think your comrade will conquer?"

"I am positive."

"Heaven grant it!" she said earnestly. "Many there are who would feel easier were Count Luca dead. I am one of them. No matter why. But come, I see that you eat nothing. Drink then, I will help you."

The wine was of the finest vintages and there was a variety to choose from.

I drew my chair closer to La Favorita's.

"What do your friends, your *very best* friends, call you?" she asked. "I would know the name, so that I may say it to you also."

"The men of the squadron call me Sans-barbe," I replied.

"Sans-barbe," she murmured, and I swear that the title I had so often found unpleasant sounded sweet when heard in her soft accents. "Sans-barbe! Ah, but I don't like *that*! Come to the sofa yonder, and let me tell you what *I* shall call you."

The sofa was far more comfortable than the chairs we had vacated. La Favorita placed her hands on my shoulders and held me off at arm's length, gazing long and earnestly into my face. A mist seemed to be gathering over her glorious brown eyes, while in their depths a strange fire flickered and smoldered. All of sudden it burst into flame. With a fierce, uncontrollable, impetuous movement she drew me toward her and placed her trembling lips to my ear.

"*Amor mio!*" she panted. "*Amor mio!* That is the name I have found for you, *carissimo!* *Amor, amor mio!*"

The portières that veiled the entrance from the hall-



way suddenly waved and gave passage to the form of the woman who had led me thither.

"*Signorina!*" she exclaimed, and then paused as if aware that she was undoubtedly *de trop*.

The remarks I made at this moment I will not write down. They were expressive, some of the things *chasseurs* were wont to say in the days of the Republic.

"What is it, Perdita?" the beautiful woman by my side demanded.

Her confidante signed to her that what she had to say was not for my ear. They conversed earnestly in whispers for a few seconds.

Then the *signorina* rushed to me, caught me vehemently by the arm and with a "make haste" that admitted of no demur on my part urged me across the room and through the curtain that I have mentioned as closed. With a whispered caution to remain quiet she sprang back into the boudoir, leaving me in the dark. Not quite in the dark either. A thin stream of light showed at the division of the portière. Noiselessly I moved until my cheek rested against the velvet, and looked curiously into the room.

A man clad in a dusty and travel-stained uniform had just entered. As my eyes rested on his face I came near betraying my presence by a cry of surprise. THE NEWCOMER WAS GENERAL BONAPARTE!

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### A NIGHT WITH BONAPARTE.

"AH, it is *you* then, Citizen General," La Favorita said, as Bonaparte approached and bent to kiss her beautiful fingers. "Your visit to me is an unlooked-for surprise. I had thought you to be still at Verona."

"I *was* there at ten o'clock this morning, *ma belle*," the general replied, "but pressing affairs called me thence to Milan, and believe me, I blessed the opportunity thus given me to gaze once more upon your lovely face."



Ignoring his compliment the *signorina* exclaimed, "You were in Verona at ten o'clock this morning! And I see you in Milan now! Truly you are a hard rider, Citizen General! Such a rate of traveling is almost incredible."

"Not when one has excellent relays and plenty of them," Bonaparte laughed. "Thanks to the King of Sardinia and the Dukes of Parma and Modena I am well provided in the matter of horse-flesh."

"The King of Sardinia and the Duke of Parma have been kind to you in other matters than horses, Citizen General," the *signorina* smiled meaningly. "There is a great deal more gold in the pockets of all you Frenchmen than they held before you came to Italy, eh?"

"As is but natural," the Corsican said coolly. "*Vae victis*, you know. Not that *you* should have any fault to find with us, my fair friend. Our presence in Milan has certainly not caused *you* to grow poorer."

La Favorita bit her lip and favored him with a flash of her great eyes, to which he seemed to pay no attention. His glance was occupied with the supper-table and the *two* chairs that were standing so close together.

"I trust my visit has put you to no inconvenience, *ma belle*," he observed. "You know that I would not for the world disarrange plans of yours, yet, from what I see, I fear that you were entertaining guests whom my coming has caused to depart. A guest, rather, I should say, for I see but one chair beside your own at the table."

"Guests! Indeed no, nor a guest either," La Favorita answered negligently. "To-day happens to be the fête of my good old Perdita, and I thought that to make a little supper in her honor would please her. I am very fond of her, my faithful Perdita. And you know, Citizen General, that the smallest attentions have great weight with the aged. We had but just ended our repast and Perdita had left the room for a moment to go and look for Caro when she noticed your approach and hastened back to announce you."

If General Bonaparte did not wholly believe the story of La Favorita, he gave no sign of incredulity. "I am sorry to hear that you have finished your sup-



per," he said simply, "I am ravenous as a wolf of the Apennines myself. I rode into Milan scarce an hour ago and went direct to the *quartier général*. There, after I had given a few necessary orders, I managed to slip away—to you. Since I left Verona I have had no refreshment."

"Oh, there is plenty left from which you can appease your wolf of an appetite, Citizen General," smiled La Favorita. "That is, if you do not object to eating after Perdita and me. Indeed, some of the dishes have not been touched. There is a *fricassée* of chicken still intact, I observe, and I know that is one of your favorites. *En avant*, my hero, show the viands no more grace than you do the Austrians."

"But will you not take the other chair, *ma belle*?" the general asked as he sat down. "Surely you are not going to let me eat alone. That were the height of inhospitality, my Favorita, and you would never have the heart to be so cruel to me!"

The voice of Bonaparte was peculiarly soft and winning when he desired it. His eyes, as he looked at the lovely *signorina*, had lost their steely expression and were full of entreaty.

"I have already supped, and I much prefer the sofa," she returned, dropping gracefully upon its luxuriantly yielding cushions. "I can talk to you from here just as well, Citizen General, and, to tell you the truth, you are not desirable as a near acquaintance to-night. You have been on horseback in the sun and dust for most of the day, remember. Pardon me if I confess that the odor of those great cavalry boots you are wearing has made my head ache."

The Commander-in-Chief frowned savagely as she finished speaking, and for some moments he did not reply. Instead he set to work on his supper, drawing the silver dish that held the chicken to him and devouring its contents with evident satisfaction. He ate rapidly and greedily, using his fingers to convey the food to his mouth. At times he paused to wipe them on the handsome linen cloth that covered the table. Finally he mumbled out with his mouth full:

"I envy you, *ma belle*. Your *chef* knows his trade, and you are fortunate in possessing him."

"I am glad you find his cookery to your taste,



Citizen General. I fancied that you were not relishing the chicken," La Favorita said somewhat dryly.

"Far from it. 'Tis delicious, I assure you. Still he would have greatly improved it had he made it with an onion sauce. Nothing goes with chicken so well as onions," the Corsican declared, reaching out for more.

The dancer gave a little shiver of disgust, which the general did not notice. He had placed himself at the table so that his back was toward the door of the bedroom. The *signorina*, on the sofa, was on his left. Though, as I have said, there was wine in abundance on the board before him he scarcely touched it, taking only a modest sip now and then. But he made up for his abstinence from the cup by the way he punished the eatables. As La Favorita had suggested, he was showing them no more mercy than he had evinced toward the hostile armies he had broken to fragments.

"And how did you leave matters in the field, Citizen General?" the lady inquired presently. "Though I need scarcely ask that; for all must be going favorably for the French since you are at liberty to return to Milan?"

"Yes, *ma belle*, you are not wrong in saying that," Bonaparte answered. "Victory still smiles on the tricolor, and my brave soldiers have covered themselves with glory. We have driven Monsieur Beaulieu out of Italy into the mountains again, and we hold Mantua harmless by blockade."

"And what of my friends among your officers, Citizen General?" demanded La Favorita. "I trust that none of them have been killed or wounded. How is that dear General Berthier? And General Lannes, too, whom I like very much in spite of his abrupt ways? and that fascinating man Murat, your *aide-de-camp*? And that hot-head Junot?"

"All those of whom you speak are yet alive," the General replied a shade impatiently. "Berthier and Lannes you may see to-morrow, for I brought them both with me."

"And what has caused you such a hasty journey to Milan?" La Favorita asked curiously.

At this moment a small, silky-haired spaniel trotted through the curtains from the hall and made at once for the table, attracted by the smell of the food.



"Ah, there he is at last ! Perdita must have looked everywhere for him except the proper place," the *signorina* cried. "Caro, my own Caro, come hither at once."

But Caro, his tail wagging vigorously and his eyes fixed on General Bonaparte, refused to obey the command of his mistress. Weighed with the contents of the table, in his doggy mind, her attractions were wanting.

"Caro possesses more discernment than you do, *ma belle*," the Corsican laughed, flinging a greasy bit of meat on the carpet for the expectant dog. "He doesn't find my riding-boots objectionable."

Caro bolted it on the instant and begged for more. The lady smiled bitterly.

"Like most of his sex he fawns where he expects favors," she sneered. "But you have not yet told me why you left Verona."

"All the fault of the way your governments are conducted here in Italy, *ma belle*," Bonaparte averred. "Feeble and vacillating as they are in their policy with foreign nations, they are worse in their dealings with their own citizens. Here are a number of discontented nobles and cashiered officers from the armies of Naples, Genoa and Turin who have raised bands of contemptible troops that they called 'Barbets' and are at work doing me all the evil in their power. To my complaints to the nations wherein their outrages have been committed I have had but one answer, 'that they deeply deplore these deeds, but the state of Italy and the hostility of the people to officers of the law renders it impossible for them to apprehend the perpetrators.' I have grown tired of hearing such replies to my demands, *ma belle*, and I have come back to Milan for the purpose of taking measures that will rid me of those Barbets once for all."

"And how will you accomplish that?" the lady asked, slowly waving a great fan she had caught up.

"How?" the General said in a sudden burst of anger. "*Par Dieu!* very easily. I'll send Lannes against them. He settled their affair at Binasco and Pavia. He'll make a progress through the fiefs of the empire that won't be forgotten for a decade !

"I demand your pardon, *ma belle*," he continued,



after a pause of some moments. "I feel that I have spoken with perhaps more warmth than I should have done. But you cannot know how these uprisings of the peasants irritate the commander of an army. Ill-advised and powerless to do him any great harm, they are still calculated to cause him much annoyance. The only way he can deal with them is to employ the harshest measures, and stamp them out at once in blood and fire. And even though he be hardened to war, the needless waste of so many lives by them that should know better must make him suffer in spirit."

"Then you call General Lannes the 'harshest measure' I suppose, Citizen General," La Favorita observed, "for you speak of him as the man you will employ to quell the Barbets."

"Lannes will be no pleasant dose for them at all events," Bonaparte said with a grim smile. "He always carries out his orders *to the letter*."

"But apropos of the Barbets, my lovely Favorita," he resumed abruptly, "there is a matter in connection with them in which your aid would be of great service to me. Part of my errand here to you to-night was to ask it. May I count upon your assistance?"

"My aid! and in reference to the Barbets!" the *signorina* exclaimed in wide-eyed astonishment.

"The case is very simple," the Commander-in-Chief began in persuasive tones. "Among the leaders of those banditti there is one who has shown himself excessively forward and active in his operations against my detachments. No other one of the Barbet chiefs has caused the Republic greater losses than he has, no other one has been more enterprising and cruel. He was a moving spirit among those who incited the insurrection that I put down by setting Binasco ablaze and giving Pavia up to pillage. After those events he fled to the mountains and gathered around him the most desperate of all their companies. He has more than ordinary ability and joins to it some military training, for he held a commission as captain in the Sardinian cavalry. From the cunning and good judgment he has displayed in what he has done, I fear he can be taken by no ordinary methods. He knows the country far too well for my horsemen to hope to trap him, and we are positive that he has friends in the



the cities and towns who keep him well informed. Difficult as the task will be, he must be taken or killed. And on the word of Napoleon Bonaparte one or other shall be done ! ”

“ His name ? ” La Favorita asked in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper.

“ Count Luca di Campogiacinto,” the general replied. “ It is a name you have heard before, *ma belle*, I am sure.”

“ Yes, I have heard it before,” the lovely dancer echoed. “ The Count Luca ! you will have to catch *him* before you kill him, Citizen General.”

“ And just *there* is where I wish you to help me,” Bonaparte said eagerly ; “ you can give me invaluable aid.”

“ *I* give you aid ! and how ? ” demanded La Favorita.

“ In this way, *ma belle* ; you and Count Luca were at one time the best of friends. Don’t endeavor to contradict me, I know what I am talking about. For you to communicate with him will be a simple matter, you know numberless means by which a letter could reach him. Write to him, then, tell him that through your acquaintance with those highest in authority among the French you have come into possession of most important information regarding their plans. State that you hold documents obtained from *me* without my knowledge that will bring their weight many times over in gold at the court of Austria. Offer to hand them to the Count on condition that you both share the proceeds. Obtain a rendezvous with him and lure him into the hands of my troopers. There ! nothing of the impossible in that, I hope. The Count will come gladly, never fear. If he be mortal man he can’t have forgotten your *beaux yeux* and will risk much to look into them once more.”

“ Have you finished, Citizen General ? ” the Italienne said in a voice that trembled strangely.

“ Quite finished, *ma belle*. Ah, I forgot one thing, the Republic will pay you superbly for your services. Trust me to see to that.”

“ Silence, General Bonaparte,” La Favorita cried, her eyes blazing and her bosom heaving with anger. “ I will not do the thing you ask me ! Your offer of



money shows how low you hold me. But you have made a mistake, my little Corsican. Learn this, and in learning it know *La Favorita* as she is. Your money can buy many things, but it cannot buy my soul! *For all the millions of Italy that you have plundered I would not stoop to such an act of treachery. I have no love for Luca Campogiacinto, but I would die rather than betray him!*"

"Then you refuse?" Bonaparte calmly asked.

"Yes, a thousand times, yes!" the dancer repeated.

No shade of surprise or displeasure crossed the general's marble countenance.

"Don't be so furious, *ma belle*," he said, smiling slightly. "Indeed I had supposed that you had no interest in the man *now* or I should not have made you the proposal. I thought you had long since ceased to care for him."

"I do not care for him," the girl answered, her lovely lips curling with scornful denial.

"Are you sure? Hard indeed to fathom is the heart of woman. She herself can rarely be sure of her feelings," the general laughed, drawing toward him a small dish of sweetmeats.

After picking idly among them for a few moments he remarked in a suggestive tone: "My ride from Verona was a weary one, *ma belle*, and I feel terribly fatigued. Will you pardon me if I venture to intimate that repose would be grateful to me?"

"No one wishes to prevent your returning to your quarters, Citizen General," the lady responded with irritating unconsciousness.

Again Bonaparte frowned and his lips closed tightly together. But he did not rise to depart. Ignoring her obvious hint he lay back in his chair and busied himself once more with the candied fruits before him.

"I have not asked you how you have spent *your* time since my leaving Milan, *ma belle*," he said presently. "I can pretty well surmise, in fact. Setting the hearts of men afire with your beauty and laughing to yourself as you see them act the part of fools. That is how you have amused yourself, *n'est-ce pas, belle Favorita?*"

"Perhaps. I haven't written down a list of my daily doings," she answered with a faint sneer. "Had I



known you wished it of course I would have done so."

"You ought to be more careful though, *ma chère*, if you will permit me to criticise your conduct," the general averred, passing over her reply without comment "You use those great eyes of yours innocently enough, without doubt, and you don't pause to think of what may come to pass in consequence. If you pictured to yourself the sorrow and misery little deeds of coquetry such as you sometimes practise are apt to cause, I am sure you would think twice about rousing the passions of men and setting their hearts ablaze."

"I cause sorrow and misery?" La Favorita pouted. "Really, you are incomprehensible to-night, Citizen General. They must have taught you at Verona to speak in riddles!"

"You know well what I mean," Bonaparte replied sternly. "A pretty story I had to listen to at headquarters. One of the noblest and most influential families in Milan is sunk in grief and mourning, and all on your account."

"Truly! I should feel flattered, I suppose," the *signorina* smiled. "I was unaware that the existence of so humble a person as myself was of interest enough to our nobility to cause them to waste a thought on me. What have I done *now* to give them sorrowful hearts?"

"Lay aside this foolery, it is unworthy of you, Favorita," the General said, severely "Your pretended ignorance of my meaning will not serve you. You cannot but acknowledge that you brought about the duel that resulted in the death of young Signor Rossoviconti."

"Rossoviconti! Ah, I understand you at last. But why should you imagine that *I* was concerned in what befell him? Bah! Citizen General, they have been telling you lies. 'Tis true that the man's attentions bored me, but they did not rouse sufficient interest in my heart to cause me to desire his death," La Favorita asserted.

"What! would you have me believe that you did not incite by your beauty one of my soldiers to pick a quarrel with your unwelcome adorer, in order to rid



you of his hated presence?" sneered Bonaparte. "That is what his family allege against you, at all events, and those whom I have questioned swear to the same tale."

"'Tis false, Citizen General," replied the dancer savagely. "The affair happened thus. I saw your young *chasseur* in the cathedral, and I do not deny that I smiled upon him, for his face took my fancy. When he would have followed me afterward in the street I gave him a sign forbidding him to do so. Rossoviconti happened to see it and was jealous. He insulted your soldier, who requited him with the sword-thrust he so well merited. That is the whole affair."

"Then the matter has been greatly misrepresented to me," the general said in mollified accents.

"As you state it I cannot see that you are to be blamed. Still, *ma belle*, I hope that this will be a lesson to you and that you will pay heed in the future to the warnings I have so often given you about the way you carry yourself in public. True, it was no harm that you smiled upon the *chasseur*. But see what that smile has done. Because you looked pleasantly into a face that attracted you for the moment, one of the nobles of your city lies dead at his home, and the Army of Italy will lose a soldier whose brief record has shown that in the future he might have done great deeds."

"The last part of what you have said is not clear to me, Citizen General," La Favorita pouted. "I know Rossoviconti is no more, but how happens it that the Army of Italy will *lose* a soldier?"

"The family of the dead noble possess much influence here in Milan," Bonaparte rejoined. "They have besought me to do justice upon his murderer, and I cannot pass over their claims. Therefore the *chasseurs-à-cheval* of Damremont will have to parade in hollow square for the benefit of the regiment's youngest sergeant."

Imagine *my* sensations as I stood behind the curtains and listened to the words that fell so heartlessly from the lips of the commander-in-chief. *Parbleu!* I can assure you that he spoke of the execution of Georges Luc with no more feeling than he would have displayed about the death of the chickens that had



been slain to furnish the dish he had so greatly appreciated some moments before.

If *I* understood him La Favorita did not.

"A strange way of satisfying the friends of Rossoconti!" she observed. "How can it please them to parade the sergeant's regiment?"

"In hollow square, I said, *ma belle*," the general corrected. "That's the way we form men now for a military execution."

Then at last the dancer comprehended.

"An *execution*!" she cried. "*Dio mio*, Citizen General, you cannot mean that! you could never be so cruel as to have him shot, that *lovely* boy!"

"*Sacré!* What is this that I hear!" Bonaparte said with astonishment. "The news seems to affect you strangely. Perhaps there was more in the story than you have acknowledged. Yes, *ma belle*, that is just what I am going to do. *I intend to have him shot, that lovely boy.*"

"I do not believe you," the *signorina* protested. "Such a thing would be inhuman. You cannot know him, Citizen General, this young sergeant. Though he is a *sous-officier* he is but a boy, a mere child in fact."

"I cannot know him, eh!" the general returned. "Indeed, Favorita, I know him very well. He is a perfect young imp of Satan, young Luc, and of a type that I would willingly weed out of my army. Though he has the charming expression of an innocent child, at heart that boy is a regular rake-hell, always on the lookout for a broil and anxious to display his skill with the sword; if he were permitted to live he would spoil many a French uniform. They tell me he once defied his superior officer and run a comrade through the body for the sake of a pair of bright eyes—ere he saw yours, *ma chère*. The only virtue he possesses is his bravery. I believe him to be absolutely without fear."

"But he must not die," La Favorita insisted. "I will not have it so. Spare him for my sake, Citizen General."

"You are as bad as Lannes," he said, laughing. "He fancies the boy also, and almost threatened me when I said that the youngster should be shot. What



I refused to his oaths I cannot grant to your entreaties, *ma belle*. Sergeant Luc must die."

But the *signorina* would not be discouraged. She protested and implored in my behalf, urging every argument, good or bad, that occurred to her, and bringing into play all the power of her wonderful beauty. To all her appeals the general returned only smiles and negative movements of his head, lying back at ease in his chair while he watched with pleasure the expressive play of her handsome features.

As I listened, my thoughts were by no means cheerful. True, I was not ill-pleased to learn that General Lannes—he got the grade after we took Pavia—was so well disposed toward me. And to hear the adorable Favorita's soft voice trembling as she begged mercy for me from Bonaparte, was sweet indeed. Yet there rose in my breast no hope of pardon as I watched the unyielding, iron countenance of the man to whom her plea was made. Behind it I could plainly see the accurately aligned platoon and the sullen black muzzles of the leveled carbines looking me in the face. *Par Dieu!* they should not bandage my eyes, though! *That* I swore to myself as I turned them impatiently from the visage of him who held my life between his plump, white fingers.

My glance happened to fall upon the *signorina's* spaniel Caro, who still sat beside the general's chair. Some object in the direction of the bedroom had attracted the little brute's attention. He was sitting up on his haunches waving his tail and pricking up his ears, his gaze fastened on the curtains of the room to my right.

Cautiously I moved until I could see what had caught his notice. In the door of the sleeping-chamber a pallid, fierce-eyed man was standing, his whole attitude reminding me of a wild beast in the act to spring. His face was advanced beyond the shadow cast by the curtains, and its features, handsome and striking, despite their whiteness and the fire that flamed in the large dark eyes, I knew on the instant. Between those folds of velvet, Count Luca Campogiacinto glared at the unheeding figures of General Bonaparte and La Favorita.

Even as I looked the Barbet chieftain covered in



one great bound the space that separated him from the commander-in-chief and grasped the general by the shoulders. A crash followed as the table was upset and the chair hurled violently aside. Then, as a shriek from the *signorina* sounded through the room, Bonaparte lay flat upon the carpet, the knee of Count Luca pressing his chest, the long nervous fingers of the Italian at his throat.

"Stop that noise!" the Barbet cried savagely to La Favorita. "If you utter another cry I'll strangle him before help can possibly arrive."

Although the count's tone was furious, he was plainly master of himself and perfectly cool and collected.

So, I am bound to say, was General Bonaparte. With admirable calmness he spoke, seconding the caution of the man who held him powerless upon the floor.

"You had better follow the instructions of your accomplice, *ma belle*," he said. "Your trap was most excellently set, but since it has been sprung with such success, you need not exert yourself to carry your part farther. You cannot deceive me, Favorita, although I know that *for all the millions I have wrung from Italy, you would not stoop to such an act of treachery.*"

His words made Count Luca start. He had not known the man whom he had overthrown until the general spoke. Eagerly he scanned the face of Bonaparte, and then he uttered a malicious laugh.

"By the mass!" he cried, "here's a greater piece of luck than I had looked for. The leader of the French armies in person! I offer you my most respectful salutations, Citizen General. As to what you have just said to the lady," he went on, "you are wronging her. She didn't expect my visit, on my word of honor. We used to know each other very well, you see, and I haven't forgotten the way to reach her presence without passing through the street entrance. Wishing to speak to her on important affairs to-night, I bethought myself of the old path I used to follow. I was delighted to find that the private door and the staircase still exist. So now you will understand how I chanced to come through the bedroom."

"So that is the way affairs stand. Well, my dear



*signor*, as you happen to be merely an *old* friend of our charming hostess, and as you saw that when you made your appearance she was entertaining another visitor, don't you think that to assault me as you have done was rude and inconsiderate conduct on your part? I give you my word that the lady can spare you no time this evening. Therefore you had better permit me to rise, and be off about your business. You can find your way out as readily as you found your way in," Bonaparte coolly suggested.

Count Luca laughed.

"*Pas si bête, mon petit général*," he chuckled. "It's evident from your speech that you have no idea as to who I am."

"Of that, I am as yet in ignorance," the general answered. "But I shall be delighted to learn your name, I assure you."

"Yes, in order to put a price upon my head, eh, general?" sneered the count. "You may spare yourself the trouble, *that* you have attended to already. For days your placards have been posted concerning me, and the hands of your soldiers itch to clutch the gold that would reward my capture. General Bonaparte, I am Luca di Campogiacinto."

The Commander-in-Chief started as he heard the Barbet chieftain's name, and then I fear that his temper got the better of him. He began to struggle, exclaiming at the same time: "You scoundrel, let me rise!"

La Favorita, half-fainting, had fallen back upon the sofa.

Count Luca easily foiled the general's efforts to free himself.

"No, General Bonaparte," he cried triumphantly, "I will never let you rise! When you leave this room you will be *carried* out! You have had a glorious dream, my young God of Victory, but it is going to end here. Instead of the volumes you have hoped to occupy in history a single page shall be your lot. That will suffice to tell the story of your Italian conquests. A brilliant theatrical drama you have made of them. You have walked the stage to the accompaniment of music raised by the shrieks of widowed women, by the cries of orphaned children. But the



plans you have laid for me, I am sure, general," he sneered presently. "You have no course but to allow me to go free. *You dare not act otherwise! Madame la Générale* will set out for Milan as fast as horses can bring her when she learns the happenings of to-night. A quiet domestic life is worth a trifle of forbearance, my little Corsican."

With an impatient gesture Bonaparte waved his hand toward the bedroom.

"Go, *signor*, by the same way you came in," he said angrily. "I spare you till I catch you outside a lady's boudoir."

At this the count grinned. Then, unhindered by me, he moved swiftly across the room to the door of the sleeping-chamber. Upon the threshold he paused, wheeled suddenly in his tracks and faced us once more.

"You may expect news of me ere long," he cried insolently, "for I frankly tell you that I go hence to work you all the damage in my power. Your convoys and your small parties of convalescents shall receive my best attentions, General Bonaparte. Some of them will never reach Milan. And yet you dare not stop me! I will fight the French until I die, do you hear! 'Twas I who made the peasants rise against your army? I and my cousin roused the mountaineers in your rear! *My cousin, la Contessa Aliandra, whose patriotism has set the Alps on fire against you!*"

I sprang forward, but Count Luca dashed through the bedroom and was gone ere I could reach him. Sullenly I came back to the Commander-in-Chief, cursing in my heart the diabolical cunning of the wily Piedmontese, whose artful mention of the name of his exquisite cousin in the presence of the Corsican was certain to bring upon her the resentment of one who paused at no extremity of ruthlessness in his punishments of those who menaced the safety of his army. In fancy I could already see the name of the beauteous Aliandra placarded in the streets, for though Bonaparte said nothing he would remember.

"And now, Sergeant Luc, we have no further business here," the general said sharply, "Come, you will accompany me back to the *quartier-général*."

"But the lady, *mon général*," I remonstrated, point-



ing to the sofa that held the lovely form of La Favorita who had now gone off into a dead faint.

"Her maid will care for her. Until she comes let her lie there," he answered in a harsh voice.

He moved toward the door that led to the hall, and in duty bound I followed. The spaniel, Caro, sprang in front of him as he neared the curtain and playfully barred his advance.

General Bonaparte uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and with his heavy military boot he dealt the poor little beast a kick that hurled him several feet away, yelping with surprise and pain.

I swore, under my breath. But the general heard me.

"What did you say, Sergeant Luc?" he demanded, wheeling about and fixing me with his penetrating eyes.

"Nothing, *mon général*."

"But you thought."

He *would* have it then. I looked him direct in the face.

"I thought, Citizen General, that I am half sorry I stopped the Count Luca."

"*Par Dieu! coquin*, you dare to be insolent!"

"*Par Dieu! mon général*, what I have said I have said."

Without replying he went on and we passed through the hall, down the stairs and into the street. On the way we met Perdita, whom I directed to go at once to her mistress.

Our walk to headquarters we made in silence.

Arrived in sight of them the general halted and said,

"You may go now, sergeant, and I thank you for what you have done. I ask no questions as to how you happened to be in a position to afford me assistance. It is enough that you were there. As you value your life, keep the events you have witnessed to yourself."

"For the lady's sake, general," I said proudly.

I was raising my hand in parting salute when a sudden thought flashed through my brain.

"The firing-party, *mon général*, how about that?" I asked.

He laughed. Then said half musingly: "He has



plans you have laid for me, I am sure, general," he sneered presently. "You have no course but to allow me to go free. *You dare not act otherwise! Madame la Générale* will set out for Milan as fast as horses can bring her when she learns the happenings of to-night. A quiet domestic life is worth a trifle of forbearance, my little Corsican."

With an impatient gesture Bonaparte waved his hand toward the bedroom.

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"The firing-party, *mon général*, how about that?" I asked.

He laughed. Then said half musingly: "He has



escaped the guillotine as a child, 'twould be hard to give him a firing party as a man."

"Sergeant Luc," he said, pulling me by the ear so that it hurt, "you had best make the Goddess of Chance your guiding deity. In any case, give thanks to her. She has saved you from the fusillade."

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## CHAPTER XX.

"TO-NIGHT COUNT LUCA WEDS THE LADY ALIANDRA."

STABLE duty completed next morning I went to my quarters and sat down upon my bed, staring blankly at the wall in deep meditation. Certain words of the Commander-in-Chief, carelessly enough uttered on the night before stuck in my brain; try though I might I could manage no satisfactory explanation of them.

"He has escaped the guillotine as a child," Bonaparte had said. There could but be one solution to this—only children of the noblesse, only scions of some family of historic name and courtly pedigree had danger of the guillotine during the Terror. And he spoke of *me*! Of me, Georges Luc, whose heart would, up to a few weeks before, indignantly have repelled such insinuation as an unmerited insult. Since I had known the Lady Aliandra the suggestion aroused in me hopes that I scarcely dared to confess, even to myself.

What if the general knew the facts connected with my birth and parentage? Would it make any difference were I to learn them from him and lay the knowledge before the contessa? Bah! I was a fool! Bonaparte must have confused my personality in his mind with that of some other. And yet he was not one to make errors. I might be noble!

What if I were? Aliandra could give no hope to the love of a peasant. The aristocrat would scorn to gain by his rank what his own worth could not obtain for him. No! by the graves of my unknown parents! I would make no move in the matter! The love of a soldier of France were an honor to any woman, aye, even to *her*. As the simple trooper of the Republic I swore that I would yet win her.



The hasty entrance of Captain Mirador cut short my musings.

"You are wanted at the *quartier général* at once, sergeant," he cried. "General Bonaparte himself has sent for you. I hope you're in no trouble, my boy?"

Assuring him that I knew of no cause for inquietude I made good speed to headquarters, where I was at once shown into a room whose only other occupant was the Commander-in-Chief. He sat behind a small table, busily engaged in writing, and briefly acknowledging my entrance bade me wait a few moments until he had finished.

I stood bolt upright at "attention," regarding him as he feverishly dashed his pen over the sheet he was covering with his indecipherable characters. Men say he himself could scarcely ever read again what he had written. He signed with an impatient scrawl and threw the pen from him. With a long sigh he lay back in his chair and looked up.

"You have had some experiences in the mountains of Piedmont, I believe, lieutenant?" he said inquiringly. "*Dame!* what ails the fool now!"

For I had so far forgotten myself as to cast a hasty glance behind me, thinking some *aide* had entered, though I had heard no sound.

"Citizen General," I stammered, "I do not understand"—

"That I have given you your epaulettes?" he broke in with a laugh of enjoyment. "Well, I have. One must be grateful for an untwisted neck. That mine is sound I owe to you, Lieutenant Luc. Hush! no acknowledgments, I do not want them. I have sent for you to give you some special orders. Have you a good memory?"

"I trust so, *mon général*," I answered modestly.

"Listen then. I have chosen you to carry out certain projects of mine because I believe you possess the qualifications necessary for their success. You are young, but you have a cool head as your going back after certain despatches once upon a time proves. You are not wanting in audacity, last night bears witness to that fact. *Diantre!* a sergeant of light-horse to aspire to La Favorita! Silence, I say. The matter is forgotten. You are fortunate in what you undertake, and



may your fortune not now desert you. Here is what you are to do."

"Lannes will start from here against the Barbets. Your regiment will make part of his force, and you, of course, will accompany it. After the main strength of the brigands has been crushed, their scattered bands must be hunted down and exterminated. When the time for this duty arrives you will take a platoon and set out in search of Count Luca Campogiacinto. You know the country and should be able to find him."

"And when I have found him, Citizen General?" I asked respectfully as he paused.

"*Then take him and hang him,*" Bonaparte returned in the swift hiss that with him betrayed strong feeling.

"You may consider it done, *mon général,*" I confidently assured him.

"String up his band likewise," he continued, pitilessly, "Capture and hang"—

He stopped, I heard him mutter:

"Softly, softly, I go too fast. *That* will never do. They say she is beautiful, those who have seen her. Too beautiful to be executed. Lieutenant Luc," raising his voice, "you must take her *alive*. Capture *her* and bring her to me."

"Bring whom, Citizen General?"

"The girl who has incited the peasants to revolt. She who calls herself the Countess Aliandra. "Ha! did you speak?"

"But a cough, *mon général*. Your orders shall be carried out."

"Very well, you may go now, that is all I have to say. This paper will be your warrant with your colonel, and here is your commission. Let it remind you always that Bonaparte never forgets."

I placed the papers in the breast of my jacket, saluted, and left the room. Somehow I found myself in the street, but I have no clear idea as to how I got there.

Passers-by stared curiously at me as I walked hurriedly along; acquaintances passed me unheeded; I heard a trooper of my own squadron whom I met mutter that Sans-barbe was becoming more of an aristocrat every day.



He little knew the struggle that agitated my poor brain !

The woman I loved had been made an outlaw ! Like a beast of the forest she was to be hunted down ! To accomplish her capture *I* had been selected !

Certain degradation, nay, possibly death itself would be my lot if I refused. To cross the will of Bonaparte might mean any punishment. Yet it was not through fear that I had accepted the general's commission.

I knew well that he could find many to do his will. That instead of to myself the task might be entrusted to some hard-headed, harder hearted, rough rider of the cavalry whose rude brutality would consider the beautiful Aliandra only as one proscribed, at whose hands she would meet with little or no tenderness.

That should not be ! No other than I should bring her to the general. With me her captivity should cause her no suffering.

But Bonaparte ! What would *he* do with her ? To what purpose was he minded to devote this beautiful prisoner ? Did the gleam of his eyes as he spoke of her, mean that—

Whatever it signified, I made my decision. “ Despite my orders ; despite Bonaparte ; despite the world ! I will contrive to save her ! ”

Although after the happenings of that eventful evening I did not lay aside thoughts of La Favorita, —Bonaparte took care I had no chance of the pleasure of a second call at her house. My regiment was immediately ordered from Milan to take the field against the Barbets in all haste, and therefore my military duties fully occupied my waking moments.

On the fourth morning after my adventure with General Bonaparte, our column entered the mountains. It was of good strength, numbering twelve hundred infantry and cavalry, the whole under the orders of General Lannes.

To the utmost extent did this energetic officer justify the confidence placed in him by the Commander-in-Chief. Rapidly he overran the districts wherein the outrages against our soldiers had been committed, hunting down and exterminating the perpetrators.

It was cruel and fatiguing campaigning, this chase after banditti. The nobles fled with their followers to



the fastnesses of the Apenines, or throwing themselves into their ancestral castles, manned the walls and bade us defiance. We tracked them to their rocky lairs and put them to the sword. We stormed their crumbling, ivy-covered towers, and ere we left, their courtyards ran with the blood of the owners. Yet the loss was not all on their side. The mountaineers could use their weapons with far greater skill than the unwarlike peasants of the plains.

In an affray with their united bands that we won, of course, in the mountains to the north of Genoa, the hopes of the Barbet chieftains were finally broken. They ceased to think of resistance and endeavored, each on his own account, to make peace with France. General Lannes then sent out small parties, both horsed and afoot, to scour the roads between Genoa and our own country and secure their safety for our convoys.

Then came the sad part of this business for me.

The time for my chase after Count Luca had come. Having shown my orders from Bonaparte to Colonel Billot I set out at the head of thirty gallant *chasseurs*, directed to speedily terminate that gentleman's affair. But many a sigh I heaved as I rode through those rugged passes, at the thought that my hands must seize the fair form of Aliandra to deliver her over to Bonaparte's stern vengeance. We had lost many good soldiers in these mountain fights, but little mercy would the being who had inspired the dwellers of the hills expect from a military autocrat.

I had fair success in my early operations. Two small bands of the Barbets I ran to earth, capturing two of the latter party.

We had passed the night in the wretched mountain hamlet where we had found the last of these marauders. I was just about finishing my breakfast in the largest room of the best house the place boasted, when old Nicholas Mauran, my corporal, entered with the news that an Italian was without who desired earnestly to speak with the officer in command.

"You have completed your preparations for the hanging of those two prisoners," I asked, for I had orders to spare no one taken in arms.



"The ropes are round their necks," answered the corporal.

"Quite right. Then let the Italian come in to me."

Presently the fellow stood before me, a wretched; half-starved appearing individual whose emaciated form was wrapped in the hooded frock of a mendicant friar. His eyes he kept bent upon the ground at first, but the deep hollows beneath them as well as the sunken outlines of his haggard cheeks told of privation and hardship lately borne. So miserable did he seem that I felt a thrill of pity for him move my heart.

In very courteous tones I said: "You wish to see the commanding officer, I believe, my good brother. Well, you may speak, for I am he."

At the sound of my voice the friar raised his hollow eyes to mine and stared at me with joyful surprise.

"Now, blessed indeed be the gracious Madonna! who has answered my prayers and brought me to one who will believe what I tell him!" he cried. "Ah, my son, I am rejoiced indeed to find that it is with *you* I have to deal."

Amazedly I stared at him. To the best of my knowledge I had never seen the man before.

"You seem to know me, my good brother," I replied, "but if I have ever met you ere to-day it must have been in my dreams. Who are you?"

"And yet you have broken bread at my board and have slept beneath my roof, my son," he reproachfully said. "Has the remembrance of my hospitality so soon passed away?"

A light flashed across my brain.

"*Tonne Dieu!*" I exclaimed. "Can this be you, Father Giulio?"

"Your memory has not played you false," he answered falteringly. "You see before you, clad in rags and overwhelmed with the deepest despair, the unfortunate Giulio, formerly priest of Binasco."

Scarcely could I believe that I had heard aright. The man was so changed that the thing seemed to be impossible.

"I must take your word for what you say, for if you be Father Giulio 'tis more than I could make oath to," I said, "What has brought you to such a pass?"

"That will be plain to you when I have told my



story, *figlio mio*," he answered. "Ah, but I will say again that I am glad *you* are to hear it. *You* will understand! After my poor town of Binasco was laid in ashes, those of my flock who remained alive decided that the level country was no safe place for them to dwell in. Under my guidance they sought a shelter in the mountains, and I lead them to a little valley I knew well, for I was born among these hills. We brought along with us what we were able to save from the flames, although that did not amount to a great deal. But ruined as we were, we nevertheless thanked Heaven that our lives were spared to us, and safe in our haven of refuge, neither the blue coats of your Republican troops nor the white ones of those who fight the Emperor's battles would ever appear among us. Counting the French and Austrians our only enemies we anticipated harm from no man. Alas, *figlio mio*, we forgot to think of the Italians.

"Three days ago a band of those who have risen against your troops came suddenly upon us. We welcomed them hospitably, nay, even with joy, for we knew their leader well. He was the Count di Campogiacinto, who had command at "Binasco on the awful day when our homes were taken from us. So we treated them as friends. *Figlio mio*, the wretches were out on a foray for provisions. They seized all that we owned, and left us not a mouthful to keep body and soul together. When I would have protested against the outrage, the Count Luca ordered that I should be tied up and given fifty lashes. Two of my parishioners who tried to protect me, they killed before my eyes. The rest ran away and I bore the punishment the Count had decreed."

"*Par la République!* But you had friends among them," I exclaimed, "Was not Giacomo there?"

"Indeed he was there! *Figlio mio*, he laid on the lashes," Father Giulio said sourly.

I could not repress a smile.

"That was not grateful in Giacomo," I remarked. "You saved him from me at Binasco, and he ought to have interfered for you with the Count Luca. And apropos of that little affair, my dear Father Giulio, I remember now that but for a piece of great good-fortune I might have slept too soundly at your delight-



ful manse, Had you been given the chance, the hospitality you recall to me had been carried farther than I'd have relished, eh?"

"My son, I was in the power of Giacomo. Had I delivered him to you, the Count Luca, who came that night would have put an end to my life with untold torments. I was obliged to swear that Giacomo was Lanciotto."

"But not obliged to aid him in cutting my throat, good father," I sneered, "you seem to have forgotten how 'the little French devil' had to leave the room you gave to him."

Father Giulio did not answer at once. His eyes searched mine as if he would read my very soul. At last he said solemnly :

"My son, if I have sinned, heaven has requited heavily the evil I meditated against you. Homeless and beggared, you see me a suppliant before you, and may deny me if you wish the very food that would prolong my wretched life. Can you ask more?"

"*Sang-dieu*, no, I cannot nor do I," I said impatiently. "Learn, my good father, that I never bore *you* resentment for that night. Georges Luc never honors with his enmity either a woman or a churchman. One can fight with neither."

"Thanks, *figlio mio*, for your forgiveness," Father Giulio returned, his eyes seeking the floor.

"And now if you have finished what you have to say, good father, to the table with you and eat your fill, that's what you came here for I suppose?" I remarked.

"But I have not yet done," he said. "My son, when the barbarians released me, they left me on the ground for dead. I had only fainted, and when I regained my senses I swore to be revenged upon him. I know where the band harbors, my son, and with me to guide you it will be easy to take Count Luca. He has not a dozen men with him."

"That is why you were seeking French troops, then?" I queried. "You wish to bring them down upon the count, eh?"

"Yes, my son, that is my dearest wish," the priest answered fiercely. "Will you go?"



"Father Guilio, I will be plain with you," I curtly said. "You deceived me once before. How then, can I trust you now?"

"If my words will not convince you, let these marks speak for me," he returned, suddenly throwing back his frock and turning to me his lacerated shoulders. "They cannot lie. Will you believe me now?"

The stripes were plain enough, in all conscience.

"I see them. You have had a brutal beating, my good father," I said after I had looked.

"Then you will go, *figlio mio*," he urged.

"*Diable*, yes. Eat something now while I consult my second in command. Then we will set out."

Father Guilio hastened to take a seat at the table and I went outside, shouting for Poignet d'Acier. The *maître d'armes*, who was rummaging about in the houses of the hamlet with others of the squad, seeking for hidden valuables, was not far off and presently came to my side. I told him the story the priest had related. When I had finished, Renaud Bronsard gave a long whistle of surprise.

"'Tis a likely enough tale, though," he declared. "To treat him thus was quite after Count Luca's fashion. As to his coming here it seems the natural course for him to take. Italians love revenge above all things. Dost believe him, Georges?"

"No, *par Dieu*! that I do not," I answered. "He says this happened three days ago. Renaud Bronsard, on the word of my father's son *the wells that cross his back are fresh*!"

"*Dame*!" the *maître d'armes* cried.

"'Tis true," I asserted. "Those marks were made not many hours since. If 'twas to mislead our judgment, *tonnerre de guerre*! Poignet d'Acier, I envy that little priest his courage. They are no make-believes. I wonder he did not die under them."

"But what do you intend to do, then, Georges?" demanded Bronsard.

"To take him at his word and let him lead us to the Count Luca," I replied. "He'll take us straight into a trap, it is true, but what then? We'll be on the alert, Renaud. And I hope that thirty *chasseurs* need not fear defeat at the hands of any number of these scarecrows of Barbets."



"*Sacré!* No, I should say not," Renaud Bronsard agreed, twisting his mustaches.

"*Hola! Citizen Sans-barbe, hola! Citizen Poignet d'Acier,*" whispered a sad voice behind us at this moment.

We turned, Tric-trac and the great ape, Agricola, had come up the street while we were talking and were both holding out their hands to our willing grasp.

We welcomed them cordially, giving the beast as glad a greeting as we did the man. We liked them both.

But even as we did this, Bronsard and I uttered exclamations of surprise the appearance of the ape was so morose and wo-begone. He hung his head as if ashamed and chattered sadly, trying to tell us some dismal tale.

"*Par bleu!*" grinned the *maître d'armes*, Citizen Agricola acts as if brooding over an insult.

"An insult!" cried Tric-trac. "He has been beaten till his bones are sore. Fancy that for a republican ape! It happened but two days ago. As usual I was near my friend Count Luca's band. Agricola had wandered from me in the mountains and returned to me like this. There must have been several of the rascals to do the business, one or two would have little chance with him. See how they clubbed him! Agricola display thy wounds!"

At his signal, the ape showed us an eye that still was red and swollen, and, with pathetic gestures, pointed to numerous bruises that the hair torn from his powerful limbs permitted us to view. Suddenly the beast uttered a hideous chattering and pointed to a near-by tree.

Following his gesture, I saw my acting provost-marshal stringing up the two captives of the night before.

To this spectacle Agricola strode, apparently greatly interested in the execution.

Though used to acts of war, I never had liking for these cold-blooded affairs and as I turned away, the mountebank spoke quickly and earnestly.

"A word with you monsieur le lieutenant, for I see you are promoted. The business on which I come admits of no delay."



“*En avant* with it then, Tric-trac !” I answered.

“It won’t take long to tell. As you know, Sans-barbe, the little corporal has had me gathering news of Count Luca Campogiacinto, a congenial task as you can guess. I have been pretty close at that gentleman’s heels for the last few days. He broke camp before daybreak this morning, but I was on the alert, and tracked the band to a spot about three miles from here where the road passes through a ravine, a very pretty place for an ambush. There the count lined both sides of the path with his followers, the bandits concealing themselves most effectively among the rocks and bushes. I saw it all from a secure place of observation, and I can tell you that they hid themselves well.

“First, though, they went through a proceeding that was comical enough. One of them, who wore a friar’s frock, laid it aside, while old Giacomo,—yes, *he* was there also,—made fierce play with a scourge on the poor devil’s back. *Sapristi*, how he wriggled and yelled ! The hand of the landlord is no light one. The object of his attentions almost fell twice. But he bore it to the end, and after he had put on his monkish dress again, he started away in this direction. I knew French troops were here, so I determined to follow and warn them not to trust him. Don’t believe what he has told you, Sans-barbe.”

On hearing this, I laughed, and related to Tric-trac my interview with Father Giulio, as well as my remarks upon the same to Poignet d’Acier. When he learned of my determination to walk boldly into the snare and trust to the skill and bravery of my *chasseurs*, the juggler shook his head.

“It won’t do, this plan of yours, Sans-barbe,” he declared. “Count Luca has thirty men with him, and they all can shoot. A single volley would do the work for your whole command. Hear what I have to propose. I can lead you by a round-about way to a place whence you can come in on Count Luca’s rear. Then, instead of surprising you, the count will receive some astonishment himself. How will that do?”

“Beautifully,” I cried with enthusiasm. “You will really do this, Tric-trac?”

“*Parbleu* ! will I? Only try me,” the mountebank



laughed. "Within an hour your men shall be fifty yards in rear of Count Luca's band. Then you must do the rest yourselves. I have no doubt that you'll be able to destroy them. That is, if they don't have look-outs posted who will tell them that you're not following the road."

"*Sacre!* and that is what they're likely to have," broke in Poignet d'Acier. "The count has most probably thrown forward along the road two or three fellows who, at our approach, are to fall back and give notice to the main body. If that be the case, and they find we don't come in sight, ten to one they'll smell a rat and be off."

"Let us hope that they don't, Renaud," I was beginning, when he cut me short.

"We can make hope certainty. 'Twill be simple to do that. If two of us follow the road and ride into their ambush, they'll think that all is well and the others are following."

"I don't like to send two men straight to their deaths, Poignet d'Acier," I objected.

"Bah! they'll run no risk at all. The brigands won't fire at *them*, you may be sure. They'll let them pass safe, waiting for the rest of the platoon, and thinking to finish the first when they come galloping back to learn the cause of the volley. So they'll get by the ambush, don't you see? Then will be your time. Count Luca's men will be too busy watching for the main body to heed anything else. You'll surprise them completely. And as for ordering any one to go, you'll not have to order. I'll volunteer, and I know old Mauran will go with me."

"What do you think of it, Tric-trac?" I demanded.

"An excellent idea," the juggler declared. "Citizen Poignet d'Acier knows what he is about."

"Then to work," I said, and speedily the *chasseurs* were assembled.

Father Giulio, still busy at table, was greatly astonished when I ordered two of my men to secure him. He began a chattering remonstrance, but seeing the juggler beside me grew very pale.

As a gag was being thrust into his jaws, the priest's tongue put a dagger into my heart.

"Make haste my grinning lieutenant," he whispered,



“or Count Luca will enjoy those charms that enchanted you the night she saved your life at my house in Binasco.”

“What do you mean?” I gasped.

“To-night Count Luca weds the Lady Aliandra.”

“How? Tell me more!”

“Never!” he jeered—and though I threatened fire and torment, he closed his lips in grim revenge—for I was now the tortured one.

But this saved Father Giulio’s life for the moment. I determined to take him with us. Later I could question him.

A stout mule was among the booty taken from the band we had destroyed the day before.

Upon this beast the priest was bound face downwards and looking towards the animal’s tail.

Thus secured, I doubted not that I could lay hands on Father Giulio when I wanted him.

Poignet d’Acier and Nicholas Mauran started in advance. After they had gone about a hundred yards I gave the command for the squad to mount and we rode out of the hamlet. We kept to the road for perhaps a quarter of a mile, and then at Tric-trac’s bidding we plunged into a narrow path to the left whose existence I should never have discovered, by my own eyes.

With the mountebank in the lead we made our way rapidly through the forest, down gullies and through ravines, scrambling among the rocks and often taking advantage of the dry beds of former water-courses. Eventually we gained a ravine where Tric-trac informed me that the horses must be tethered and the rest of the march made afoot.

“You need leave no men to guard the beasts,” he observed. “Tie them fast, that’s all. They will be perfectly safe.”

“But how about *him*?” I demanded, pointing to the wretched Father Giulio.

Tric-trac laughed.

“I’ll provide for him, never fear,” he said. “Agricola, come hither.”

He made some strange, jabbering noises, and, on the word of Georges Luc, that gifted monkey at once took his station alongside the mule that bore the priest, showing his teeth in a most threatening manner, and



glancing towards a tall fir-tree that stood out into the sky above them. But I noticed more. There seemed to be an intense and hideous joy on the ape's face—a kind of ashen fear upon the priest's.

"We'll find him here when we return," the juggler told me in a voice that was clearly audible to Father Giulio.

So we left the good father, under the charge of his strange guardian, and once more followed Agricola's master.

For three minutes we pressed on behind him, carrying our sabers under our arms to prevent the clank of their scabbards betraying us. To the foot of a high elevation that formed one side, and that the northern, of the gorge that we had entered he directed our course. Then, before beginning the ascent, he asked me to pass the word along the line for very careful climbing.

I gave the necessary direction and motioned to Tric-trac that we were ready.

Slowly and with the greatest pains to keep from betraying our presence to the enemy our advance was made. Within half-a-dozen paces of the brow of the hill the juggler signaled for the men to halt. Then he beckoned me forward, dropping at the same time on his hands and knees. Imitating his example, I crawled to where, peering over the crest of the hill, I could plainly view the whole of the trap set for my troopers by the Count Luca.

Below me, at scarce fifty yards distance, ran the road by which the Barbets expected us. Lying in wait among the boulders and clumps of bushes that fringed its edge, I counted eighteen villainous-appearing brigands, all armed to the teeth. As Tric-trac had said, they had chosen their position with good judgment. So near to the road were they that for their bullets to go astray was well-nigh impossible. Had I ridden in among them as I had purposed the birds of the hills had been well gorged on the bodies of French *chasseurs* long before midday.

My lips tightened as I marked the white hair of Giacomo, who was ensconced behind a great rock almost exactly in my front. Sharply I looked for Count Luca, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"You'll not find him there," whispered Tric-trac,



who actually seemed to read my thoughts. "He is with those on the farther side of the road."

"How many more do they number?" I breathed in his ear.

"A dozen beside Campogiacinto. I told you he had thirty men," the juggler returned with impatience.

Upon this scene we gazed perhaps four minutes, I gradually and carefully signaling my men into position so that no bandit could escape. Then two agile mountaineers came leaping down the roadway below us. Into the bushes on the northern side they dived, a branch or more cracked as they forced their way through them, and all was still as before. A few moments after, with thud of hoof and jingle of steel, my two brave comrades rode into view.

Leisurely and careless was their progress, the reins hung loose upon their horses' necks, the beasts of Bronsard and Mauran came on at a slow walk, their riders were chatting together with as much unconcern as if they had been in the heart of France. Occasionally, it is true, they cast a glance over the road before them and examined the trees on either hand. But it was done in a listless, perfunctory manner that appeared to indicate that they thought themselves perfectly secure from danger.

Onward their tardy chargers bore them between the lines of the mountaineers as they lay crouched in their coverts like so many tigers in readiness to spring. Then was the time to mark the courage and insensibility to fear that dwelt in the hearts of those two perfect soldiers. They made no pause in their merry conversation. No tremble of tone, no hesitation of speech, no wandering of the eye betrayed the fact that they knew—as they did well, for Tric-trac had accurately located the ambuscade—that they were riding through the very jaws of death. As they passed below my station Renaud Bronsard smote his thigh and laughed at some remark of old Mauran's—a laugh that rang true and clear as the breeze carried it away and flung it back in echoes from the hills.

Our ambuscade would be a sure success. Count Luca would be no bridegroom this night,—for he would be dead, I chuckled, and was about to give the word.

Just then a hideous scream rang out far down the



glen, a curious, distant chattering and yelling floated in the hot and dusty air.

Suddenly, with wild cries, Giacomo and his peasants, followed by Luca and his bandits, sprang up and fled through the rocks and bushes, not taking the roadway, but going like mad over the hilly country.

Astounded, I ordered my men to fire, but in the hurry few fell to our shots, though Bronsard and Mauran, as they charged after them, each got one of the flying wretches upon his sword.

A moment after every man of Luca's band had disappeared, speeding up the ravine.

"*Diable!* what caused their sudden panic?" muttered Tric-trac at my side.

"Listen!" I whispered, for the jabbering and shrieking still rang out on the air.

A moment more and I had clambered down the hillside, followed by my men, and stood in the road.

Here Bronsard and Mauran joined us with dripping swords.

"*Dame!* What could have frightened our rascals so suddenly?" I asked.

For answer, the *maître d'armes* pointed towards a high fir tree upon the hillside further down the pass.

Then all of us uttered an astounded cry, for from its topmost branch hung dangling the body of a man.

To this tree we rode hurriedly.

Beneath it were our horses, likewise the mule that had borne the priest, but it was riderless, for from the high fir tree hung in plain relief against the sky the body of Father Giulio, most neatly executed in provost-marshal style.

Beneath stood the ape, saluting grimly like a grenadier who has done his duty.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WOLF WITHIN THE BEAUTY'S BOUDOIR.

At view of this a shout of rage came from some of my troopers. "The accursed beast," they cried, "has, by his monkey trick, warned our enemy and destroyed our ruse."



"*Tonne Dieu!*" growled Sergeant Santron, "this brute has done a great service to the traitor Barbets."

"What prompted Agricola to this peculiar act?" I queried hastily of Tric-trac, keeping back some of my men, for they would have laid violent hands upon the ape, who still kept saluting and jabbering as if reporting to a superior officer.

"First, the peculiar love of imitation that all monkeys have. Agricola simply followed the proceedings he saw your provost-marshal take this morning with the two other prisoners," answered the mountebank. "Second, the joy of revenge, common to apes as well as man. I do not doubt Father Giulio was one of those who had a hand in beating poor Citizen Agricola."

"O, then the worthy beast but avenged an insult! *Parbleu!* I honor the monkey-gentleman, for his conduct," laughed Poignet d'Acier. "Citizen Agricola, I salute you."

And he greeted the jabbering brute with military ceremony. A performance in which the *maître d'armes* was followed by most of the platoon.

"Nay, do not bear malice against him, Lieutenant Sans-barbe; Agricola was but doing with the noose what you would have done with your ready saber," continued Bronsard, for I was regarding the ape with a savage eye. I remembered the monk's lips he had closed forever could have given me further explanation of Father Giulio's words: "Count Luca weds to-night the Lady Aliandra."

Luca had escaped me. *Misericorde*, he might now make true the dying utterance of the priest. Thinking of this I gave hasty orders for pursuit.

"We'll catch the fox yet, my lads," I cried, "before he reaches his lair!"

Another moment and I had, with youth's rashness, been galloping along the highway up the glen upon the track of the man who was now doubly my enemy; but Tric-trac suddenly laid his hand upon my arm and spoke in warning voice.

"*Diable!* would you run into another ambush?" Think you not by this time the Barbets have rallied? and will they not contest every mile of that road to Luca's castle?"



"You believe he'll fly there?" I asked eagerly.

"He must, he has no other harbor of safety in these hills."

"Then lead me there," I cried.

"In good time, but not by this road," answered the juggler. "We will make a detour. 'Twill be hard traveling, but as we turn our horses' heads away from his stronghold, Luca will think we have given him up as a bad job and are returning to Milan. Order your troop to follow me, lieutenant, I know every by-path of these hills."

Bronsard agreeing that Tric-trac's suggestion was wise, I gave the necessary directions and moodily turned my face from the direct path to my enemy, and perchance also my love. I feared the priest's dying words had too much truth in them."

So along rough roads we journeyed, up hill and down, crossing mountain torrents, but gradually making a half circle, I could note by the sun.

As we rode, Tric-trac, who was mounted on the priest's mule, at my side, explained certain important facts to me, about our coming adventure. "Castle Campogiacinto," he remarked, "is a place so naturally strong that Luca with his remaining peasants and bandits could hold it against a regiment. "Our only chance is a surprise!"

"And how will we do that?" I asked impatiently.

"Trust Tric-trac for that!" laughed the juggler. "I have not been the supposed friend and confidant of my enemy Luca for nothing." And a grim smile lighted the face of the mountebank as he gazed at the accursed ape, Agricola, who followed in our path, bestriding an unwilling and frightened country horse upon whose lean ribs he every now and then beat a tattoo with his heavy fists, to the merriment of my troopers who rode after him.

"But the attack must be made to night," I said impulsively. "And though the sun is going down, I see no signs of Castle Campogiacinto!"

"It is yet ten miles away."

"*Diable*, so far!"

"We dare not approach it by daylight. With your permission, Lieutenant, we will camp here," answered



the juggler, pointing to a little valley down which trickled a mountain rill, and beyond which the road seemed very rugged.

"But Count Luca must be mine to night!" I muttered, a dogged despair in my voice.

"And mine is the only plan that gives you chance of it, my *lover*!" whispered Tric-trac. "Dost not think," he added, "I noted your misery as Father Giulio jeered: 'Count Luca weds to-night the Lady Aliandra?' Let your men rest and I will tell you further!"

"I gave the orders, my wearied troopers hastily threw themselves off their tired steeds and made a mountain bivouac as the sun went down, red and fiery, behind the Western hills.

As they did this, I whispered to the juggler in a fainthearted voice. "You do not think the Lady Aliandra weds him *willingly*?"

"*Diable*, no! He wants her to marry him, Sans-barbe. Luca has exhausted all the arts of a lover to no purpose. There is nothing left to him but to try force or stratagem. He is not above that, the man is desperate and will dare anything, for Lady Aliandra's marvelous beauty and great estates. Has she not cause to be afraid?"

"*Sacre*! that she has," I swore between my teeth. "We'll foil him, Tric-trac. The castle must be taken and my lo—I mean the *contessa*, *shall be saved and he shall be hanged*! Then I muttered, "But it is ten miles by a mountain road. How can my tired men get there in time?"

"That I will now explain!" answered the juggler. "I know a way through the wilds that I use myself, but by night the leading of so large party I could not answer for."

"Yet to-night we must carry out our purpose if it is to be done at all," I said determinedly; then asked eagerly; "How many men could you guide along the path you mention?"

"One, yes, two with certainty. No more."

"You shall have the two! *Hola! Poignet d'Acier!*"

The *maître d'armes* joined us immediately. Rapidly I told him what lay before us. He asked only one question. "When do we start?"



"At once. We'll have time to eat upon the road," Tric-trac responded.

"In five minutes I'll be ready," I said.

Calling Pierre Santron, who during the campaign had attained the grade of ranking sergeant of the troop, I entrusted him with the command of the *chasseurs*. As soon as the men were sufficiently refreshed he was to set out at their head for the castle, the road to which Tric-trac carefully explained, mounted if possible, afoot if the horses had not recovered their strength. Santron swore that he would do his best, and I knew that the Breton would be better than his word.

Seeing Agricola by the side of the juggler as we were about to start I suggested that the ape might be a hindrance to our success.

"Hadn't you better leave him here, Tric-trac?" I said. "He might again destroy our plan. We'll be much better off without him."

"The deuce, we'd be better off without Agricola!" his master answered in offended tones. "Why, Citizen Sans-barbe, on *him* depends our getting into the castle at all! Besides when it comes to battle—wait—only wait! See how the ape can fight, if he takes the notion!"

I could not myself perceive how Agricola could be vitally important as a factor in our anticipated victory. Yet since his master declared that such was the case I made no more objections to his forming one of our company.

Led by the juggler we entered the woods and forced our way through them for perhaps half an hour, heading always north. At the end of that time we came out into a narrow mountain-path that was plainly enough marked to the eye, though it showed few signs of having recently been traveled. Along it we proceeded in single file, making much better progress. No halt we made in our march until the sun had sunk.

Then the juggler declared that we had time enough for the evening meal to be eaten. Rations and flasks were accordingly produced, and we recruited well our powers for the work before us. Hunger satisfied, onward we pressed again through the thickening dusk of the evening.

Darkness gathered fast among the mountains, but



we had no difficulty in following our guide. He had guarded against that.

The mountebank had procured a long bit of cord about the thickness of one's little finger. Holding the end himself, he passed along the coil to Agricola, who handed it to me, retaining at the same time his own grasp on the rope. Poignet d'Acier, who was behind me, seized it next.

Thus, all of us holding to the cord, we were enabled to follow Tric-trac with perfect certainty. As for him he knew the path as well in the dark as he did by daylight. Forward he hurried with never a break nor moment of hesitation in his rapid walk, and we kept pace with him easily, though it had become so dark that I could not see the back of Agricola before me. We had covered a few miles when suddenly I came crash into Agricola and found by *that* that he and his master had halted. Poignet d'Acier did the same for me a second later.

"What is it, Tric-trac?" I demanded cautiously. "Have we arrived?"

"For the present at least, Sans-barbe. The castle is just ahead, but there is no use of our going farther now." Then his words astonished us. "To do this trick, the ape must have moonlight!"

So we stood patiently there in the night and waited for the appearance of the moon.

From the inky black before us there was borne to our ears the rippling splash of running waters. That was the only sound that greeted them, save the sweep of the wind among the boughs of the trees overhead.

Several spears of light seemed to shoot across the valley.

Noting them, I whispered: "His castle?"

"Yes!" muttered Tric-trac. "The infernal scoundrel!"

But I was not thinking of him. My mind was upon her. One of those spears of light might come from her chamber, where they were arraying her to be his bride.

A moment later the juggler spoke to me, a sudden sadness in his voice:

"And if you rescue the Lady Aliandra from Count



Luca will it be to take her youth and beauty to the military vengeance of General Bonaparte, who is not over merciful to rebels and insurgents."

To this I only answered with a broken sigh. I knew as well as he, the danger hanging over the poor girl. Military discipline pulled one way, love pulled the other. When I saw her appealing beauty, military discipline would probably "about face!"

Perchance some fear of this must have been in Poinet d'Acier's mind, his voice came to me sternly :

"Sans-barbe, I will talk with you about this after you have captured our General's fair prisoner."

I feared what the martinet *maître d'armes* would say, so I answered him naught, but sat silently on.

For a long time we waited. Gradually the sky to the east began to lighten, though in one huge space the murk of night seemed to gather with greater intensity. Then the great orb of the moon sailed majestically up over the crests of the mountain, and the scene before us was flooded with her mellow rays. They showed us a broad expanse of clear sky, with broken masses of clouds sweeping here and there across the heavens.

We stood in the mouth of a narrow gorge, between two frowning heights, that opened into a valley running north and south, the same, as I afterward learned, in which stood the inn of Giacomo. The home of the landlord, however, lay many miles below.

Directly before us, at a distance of some fifty feet, a stream, broad and shallow, flashed away in the moonlight. On the farther side of the water a huge mass of rocks rose up, filling the middle of the valley. The height of the mound they formed was fully sixty feet, its sides were rough and nearly perpendicular. From the broad summit of the precipitous crag the battlements and towers of a great stone castle reared themselves against the sky of the summer night. Beyond them, to the east, a gloomy background of mountains served to accentuate and throw out more plainly their sullen and forbidding contours.

More light flitted from the windows.

"The wolf is in his lair," muttered Bronsard.

"Without a doubt," Tric-trac answered, with a strange ring of joy in his voice.



"Wait for me here for a moment, my lieutenant," he continued.

He disappeared, and I could hear him rustling about in a clump of bushes to our left. Within five minutes he was back, bearing a great burden of some sort on his shoulders.

"*En avant*, now, Citizen Sans-barbe," he whispered. "And pray that the Goddess of Climbing give you a clear head and a certain foot. You will need both."

Out we moved in single file, keeping in the shade of the trees as much as possible. Then we entered the stream. The water was not deep, coming but a few inches above our ankles. Across we splashed and were speedily hidden in the black shadows cast by the great cliff that held the castle. There we moved closed to Tric-trac, eager for him to show us the path we were to follow in our ascent.

"Don't you be impatient, citizens," the mountebank chuckled. "There's a *gentleman* among us whom I intend to lead the way, and you must give me a chance to talk to him. Agricola, my friend, come hither."

For some moments, aided by vivid gestures, Tric-trac conversed with the ape in a curious jabbering sort of chatter, sounding to me like the utmost nonsense.

Agricola knew what his master meant, however. The juggler ceased, and presently the soft sliding of dirt and the rattling fall of small pebbles announced that the ape had started to scale the crag.

"What's this for, Tric-trac?" I whispered angrily.

"It's as it should be," he responded in confident tones. "We've been here before, Agricola and I. He's taken me safe into Castle Campogiacinto twenty times by this path. He's carrying a rope that I tied loosely over his shoulders, to the top of the wall. The other end of the line I have fast to this ladder of cords. 'Twas to get this apparatus that I left you just before we crossed the brook. Arrived at the top Agricola will draw up the ladder and make fast the ends. Then we will mount in our turn."

"*Par Dieu!* But this is a dizzy road you would have us follow, Tric-trac!" I muttered.



“Ha! the ladder begins to rise!” whispered the *maître d’armes*. “Bravo! Agricola!”

Presently the mountebank declared that the ladder was ready to be mounted.

“When I’m at the top I’ll shake the cords *hard*, Sans-barbe,” he said as he began to climb. “Then do you ascend, with Citizen Poignet d’Acier to follow the last.”

I did not much relish this manner of getting into the castle. It seemed several minutes after the juggler started before the ropes were shaken in a vigorous fashion. This told me my turn had come. With my saber between my teeth I grasped the ropes and moved upward. Even now to think of that torturing climb makes my brain reel, and I seem to feel again the yielding, swaying ropes beneath my feet as I swung out into empty space. I managed it somehow, and stood finally beside Tric-trac and Agricola on one of the battlements of Castle Campogiacinto’s western tower.

A few minutes after, the *maître d’armes* was beside us.

“Tric-trac,” I whispered, “take us to the Lady Aliandra’s chamber. I command now. We must act like lightning!”

“Your plans, boy?” asked Bronsard shortly,

“To seize my prisoner in her chamber and defend it. That will keep Luca and his band busy and occupied attacking us till my platoon arrives.”

“Spoken like a soldier of the Republic,” said my military mentor, patting me affectionally upon the shoulder.

“Perchance it is the best thing we can do,” assented the juggler. “The lady may even become our friend when she sees her captor. By this time she must have some suspicion of her patriot guardian and his intentions to her. Besides, there is a stairway leading to the retreat of beauty that may be defended by two such men as Bronsard and Sans-barbe.”

“Then, pray God we are in time. Lead on—Let the ape stay here and guard the ladder, in case we have to retreat. Besides, at proper opportunity, do you steal back, Tric-trac, and hurry my troopers along the road.”

“Come!” whispered the juggler. “I’d never dare



this thing were it not for a vengeance I love better than my life."

"And Georges, because he is a fool for love," muttered Bronsard, grimly,—“and I, because I want to spit the Wolf, and always obey the commands of my officer!"

"Follow me!" begged Tric-trac. "Tread lightly or we are all dead men. Fortunately, the lady whom you seek, if in her chamber, can be found without descending to the main hall of the castle."

As well as I could see in the semi-darkness, we had made our entry on one of the upper battlements.

Following the mountebank, who seemed to know the place thoroughly, we left the outer walls and groped along a stone passage.

After some fifty paces of this, we reached a stout door hanging upon rusty and broken hinges. With some exertion, our guide succeeded in pushing it far enough ajar to allow our bodies to pass through the opening.

Here we found a passageway dimly lighted by small lamps set in its walls at long intervals.

Fortunately this light permitted us to follow each other's steps without stumbling as silence now seemed to be important, for Tric-trac's movements were noiseless. He had placed his hand upon his lips, warning us to give no voice, and both Bronsard and myself carried our sabers in our hands to prevent their clanking.

As we approached the end of this passage, a greater light seemed to enter it from a wide stone stairway that came up into it from some illuminated room below. Apparently the apartment below was the banqueting-hall of the Castle, for, as we drew near, the sound of carouse and wine-drinking and boisterous voices ascended to us faintly.

With military instinct the *maître d'armes* silently placed himself at the head of the stairway, while turning to a near-by door upon the passage that had been carelessly left a handbreadth open by some one entering hurriedly, Tric-trac whispered to me:

"Her boudoir, Sans-barbe."

I started forward, hastening noiselessly to that glittering thread of lamp-rays.



Before I reached her door the voice of Aliandra came to me and I slackened my pace. If some one were with her I must take thought before I made my appearance. As her sweet tones ceased, those of a man made answer, their sound sending a thrill of fury through my whole frame. Count Luca was with the *Contessa*."

"Power of Heaven ! were they already wedded ?"

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## CHAPTER XXII.

BY ORDER OF GENERAL BONAPARTE.

To the slightly opened door I glided, and there stood fast.

As I reached the threshold I heard the lady remark in caustic suggestion : "I am very tired, Luca, and you will pardon me if I send you away. To-morrow we can talk further on this matter."

"With all due allowance for your fatigue, fair cousin," the Count replied half sneeringly ; "this matter cannot wait. To-night you must hear what I have to say."

These were no bride's speeches nor bridegroom's tones. My heart beat again.

"I wish to hear no more," said Aliandra, decidedly, "unless you will deign to inform me, my autocratic guardian, why you brought me from the peasant's hut I loved, to this gloomy castle."

"Can you not guess, Aliandra mia ? My fears for your safety from the marauding French ?" answered the man's voice.

"Also why are there sounds of merriment from the hall below ? Why, by your direction, did my maid robe me this evening in white ?" said the girl. There was a tremulous inquiry in her sweet voice that made me think she feared some unknown latent danger.

"Because," answered Luca, with a kind of jeering despair in his tones, "this is my *last* night in my Castle of Campogiacinto. These worthy fellows who carouse with me are the last of the Barbets !"

"The last of the Barbets ? *Dio mio !* You cannot mean that all are slain, save your few followers ?" faltered Aliandra, in tones horrified and amazed.



"The very last! Defeated in open battle, hunted through every defile of our mountains, shot down and executed by the remorseless French. These are the very last of the poor fellows your beauty, your enthusiasm has urged to take up arms—the last of the victims your patriotism has made for Italy!"

"O Madonna, can this be? Has what you taught me would be a winning cause come to an end so miserable?" sighed the girl. "And I had thought my name might go down in the records of time as that of an Italian Joan of Arc; that, aroused by me, the peasants of these mountains might have freed our soil from the remorseless French invaders. You taught me that, Luca, and I believed your knowledge of the state of the country, of the military situation." There was an awful reproach in Aliandra's tones. "Prompted by you I have made their love for me sentence these true-hearted peasants to the bullet, the sword, the noose, because they loved me. Gone, all gone! and with them the last hope of my country!" and the girl burst into a wail of anguish that made me know that the Lady Aliandra Campogiacinto, was not only true patriot, but tender-hearted woman. Perchance had I been an Italian, I would have done the same as she.

But even as I reflected, the sweet voice came to me again, strangely calm, and haughty with a great disdain, as she muttered, "And I was your tool!"

"My tool! What do you mean? Aliandra, have I not been a patriot like thee?" came Luca's answering cry.

"No! For you did this for Austrian *gold*! Luca Campogiacinto. These letters from Vienna and Milan.—ah! do not start to take them from me! they came into my hands by accident in an unused room of this gloomy castle,—these say you have received the Emperor's pay for being an Italian patriot!"

"And why not should I take money to be spent in arming the insurgents?" sneered the count.

"*Then why didn't you arm them?*" cried the girl. "They fought only with the weapons of the chase and husbandry; scythes, flails, even their naked hands were upraised against the weapons of a veteran army. No! the money was not spend for patriotic uses, but on the gambling tables of Milan!"



Here her voice was dominated by his crying sternly "Silence, girl! I have no time either for recrimination or discussion. I have time only to fly."

"Fly!"

"Heavy rewards are offered for me, dead or alive, by Bonaparte. But for your sake, Aliandra, I will break through the toils. By this hour to-morrow, I shall be far upon my way to the Tyrol, thence to Vienna. At the court of Austria *we* shall find a certain refuge."

"WE!"

"Yes, for you go with me. Dost think I will not save you or die with you, when I have been patriot on account of you, to merit your approval, to win your love?"

"My love!" *Madre mia ; my love ?*" and Aliandra burst into a mocking laughter that was half hysterical.

"Yes! Have you not seen it in my eyes from the moment you became the fairest woman in the land? Did not I, as your guardian, devote my life to building up your great fortune? Did not I shield you from the world? Did I not keep you secluded in these mountains among our peasants so no other man of your own rank or station could see and love the graces that charmed my eyes and fired my passion? Has not each act of my life proved my adoration of you? At the insult you underwent at the hands of those brutal French troopers—whose sword flew first from its scabbard to avenge it? Luca's! Who, in all the blood and death of these mountain combats, has kept you far from danger; ay, even from alarm? Luca! the man upon whom you are gazing with distrustful eyes. *Adorata mia*, can you not see that though my sword was drawn for Italy, it was drawn also for *you*? That you are to me the earthly embodiment of the spirit of my country? Love of my native land means love for *you*!"

"I—I might believe you did not I know you had received the Austrian gold," muttered the girl sternly. Then she broke out at him pathetically, yet scornfully, "Ah, how could you do it? You whom I once deemed so noble, so stainless in honor?" Then her voice grew cold and stern. "It is well, Count Luca, that this is



thy last night in Castle Campogiacinto. The home of our race has no place for such as you who took gold to arm Italy, yet squandered it at the gambling table and on the delights and allurements of the dancer, La Favorita, in Milan."

"La Favorita? *Diavolo!* I tell you it is false!" cried the man. "How can you have the cruelty to speak thus to one who loves you as madly as I do? But this is no time for words; there is only time for action. We leave to night for the Tyrol. Lady Aliandra, that white robe you have on, is the decking of my bride. The last of our retainers even now down there within the banquet hall are drinking to our happy nuptials!"

"Happy nuptials?" screamed the lady. Then she gasped out as if it were incredible; "To save my life I must be—your bride?"

"Of course! Your fair fame I must guard. There is a priest below. To save you from an ignominious death I must take you with me."

"You jest!" the *contessa* said in a perplexed voice, then faltered, "Death!—at the hands of whom?"

"At the hands of the French, fair cousin! You have been a patriot. You have had your share in the pretty little fêtes we provided for their entertainment."

"But they cannot know that!" she cried.

"Aye, but they do! Your name is upon Bonaparte's tablets prominent as one who stirred the peasants to revolt. A price is set upon your fair head. Your description can be read, placarded on the walls of Pavia and Milan. To such lengths are you sought, that an officer with a special mission has been intrusted with your capture. Wed me and I will save you. Ah! you hesitate because we are cousins. 'Tis against the precepts of the Church that those of such near-by blood should marry. But behold! upon my breast I have a dispensation from the Pope of Rome permitting the wedding of Luca to his cousin Aliandra. Now come with me to the priest who is waiting to marry you to the man who will save your life!"

"NEVER!"

There was a tremulous despair in the girl's voice that filled me with a sudden hope.

Cautiously I pressed open the door. The sight with-



in would have made any lover's heart beat high and fast. Within a room lighted by several lamps, apparently from its luxurious hangings, delicate ornaments, and silken couches and cushions, the resting-place of beauty, stood the Count Luca, dressed for his nuptials, not in the uniform of a soldier, but in the fashion of the court, ruffles and laces, and knee breeches and ribbon bows, and at his side the long rapier of the gentleman, not the saber of the trooper.

Facing him, robed in virgin white from which sprang chiseled shoulders of gleaming snow and fair arms of exquisite grace was his cousin the Lady Aliandra. From the alabaster column of her neck to fairy feet, were the beauty-curves of a Venus outlined by draperies, soft and clinging; above, a face haughty as a Juno's, yet despairing as Niobe's, the eyes shining with anger, yet dewy with despair, the exquisite lips red as rosebuds, yet curled in haughty scorn.

"You refuse my offer though it means your life?" whispered the noble unbelievably.

"Though I die, I'll ne'er be wedded unto you!" said the girl slowly, yet determinedly.

"*Gran Dio*, then you must love another?"

At this Aliandra burst into a mocking, almost hysterical laugh, while he, smiting his brow, muttered, "No, no! that is impossible! My measures were too well taken in all these years. None but our rustic clowns, our peasants of the mountains, have approached you, except, indeed, those accursed French *chasseurs*, two of whom I once thought you aided to escape from Giacomo."

As he spoke, my eyes were turned upon her face. Upon it gradually but slowly rose a flush, faintly at first, until it became radiant as the roses.

And Luca saw this, too, for he cried out hoarsely: "Ah! what is this? *Basta!* Your eyes kindle!" then smote his hands together and muttered, "What nonsense! Impossible! You cannot have lost your heart to one of them. You do not answer; your look is bent upon the floor; you cannot meet my gaze. *Corpo di San Marco!* I believe by all the gods she loves the boy in uniform! A villainous little French roué with a baby face, without mustache!" Then suddenly he jeered, "But he cares no more for you than a rotten orange,



my proud *contessa*. Your *preux chevalier* now makes one of the worshipers that kiss the little feet of the courtesan La Favorita.

"It is not true! I don't believe you!" cried the girl, with such sudden anger it made me joyous, though I felt the stain her purity put upon me. Then she whispered: "You insult me, *signor*! Leave my room!"

Her delicate hand was raised in warning; for, lured by her beauty, that might have driven any man to madness, Luca was approaching her.

"And yet," he said, a strange sneer in his voice, "I will forgive your passing penchant for this beast of a French cavalryman. I will still marry you. What is there left for you, poor outlaw, with the power of France against you, but to fly with me!"

"An outlaw!"

"Yes. One that I have made."

"You?"

"Of course! I love you so well I have made my fate and yours the *same*."

"You, who said you loved me!"

"Yes, I! To Bonaparte himself I gave the information. To Bonaparte, who never forgets and never forgives. I love you so desperately that I would unite our fates by the closest bonds, therefore, Aliandra, *mi adorata*, I have made you an outlaw like myself. My love places you in peril, but my love will save you. Proscribed, hunted, pursued, but still my own—Come to the priest, my Aliandra. At the altar!"

"No, no! I cannot! I—"

"As husband and wife we will escape together. Then, when the French have been swept away forever from this land, as they ultimately must be by the power of Austria, *we* will return, and in your great estates will be the lord and lady paramount of all the hills of Piedmont."

"Pah! your love is of the same order as your patriotism! always my estates!" jeered the girl in bitter scorn. "Money; *always* money! For *that* you made me a patriot; for *that* you would have me believe in the passion that destroys me! And you, my guardian, did this thing. Luca, how could you wrong me so?"

"How? Because all's fair to such strong love as



mine! Why! Because to-night I'll prove to you that, though I've placed danger on you, I adore you. Quick, to the priest, my Aliandra! Ah, *anima mia* when you see my passion, yours will flame up to it."

"Never!" cried the girl, her face aglow with blushes. "Speak thus to me again and I shall hate you!"

"Then, if you'll not yield to my love, you shall yield to my authority. I, your guardian, command you. To the priest, and bow your head in obedience to the man who has sworn you'll call him husband; aye, and love him as one, this very night—come!"

A faint, gasping shriek came from the trembling lips of her I worshiped. I sprang into the apartment.

Count Luca had seized the girl by one of her white arms. Ere he could lay hand to his sword my fingers were at his throat. One vicious shake I gave him, then—fool that I was to loose my grip of him—I hurled him half-way across the room.

"Your pardon, Count Campogiacinto," I said as he brought up with a thud against the tapestry that covered the wall, "excuse my interfering, but this lady cannot be yours."

"She cannot, eh?" he yelled, reeling and holding one hand to his neck. "She cannot! For what reason?"

"Because she is *my* prisoner! And you likewise for that matter. By order of General Bonaparte I arrest you *both*!"

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TWO MASTERS OF THE RAPIER.

I THINK that before I spoke those last words, Count Luca had not recognized me.

As he heard my voice, the Barbet chieftain gave a shout of surprise. "You?" he cried with a strange venomous triumph in his voice. "My sans-culotte, French boy-lieutenant, you're doomed!"

"Your sword, my dear count," I uttered blandly. "You are under arrest, you know?"

"We'll see about that," he sneered. "How you came here, I know not. But, when you entered my castle, you destroyed yourself!" Then, with a move-



ment quick as the stroke of a snake, he disappeared into the draperies, against which I had been fool enough to throw him.

With a bound I was after him, but only saw a dark and narrow stairway that could permit but one man's passage, descending to the lower floor. Up this, now came to me the voice of Luca crying to his followers : "Quick, barricade the doors and lower gateway so that none of his men can enter to his aid. We have the French lieutenant in and trapped !"

For the moment, pursuit of him was useless. I turned to the *contessa*. She had staggered against a table. Her exquisite face was very white ; her perfumed breath came and went in hurried gasps ; her lovely eyes were fixed upon me. In them, was an expression that I could not read.

"You whose life I saved at the cost of my—my modesty—are the officer appointed to give me—military justice !" she whispered, a strange pathetic reproach in her voice.

I could not say the words ; for answer I merely bowed.

"And you the man I"—she burst out ; but checked herself, biting her lip until the blood came ; then added coldly yet falteringly : "That means I am your prisoner?"

"Yes, Lady Aliandra, by order of General Bonaparte," I whispered sadly.

"You are to take me to—to his vengeance? *Ahi*, don't shake your head. I know the mercy the French commander will show an Italian lady who raised an insurrection of peasants against the laws of war.

Then she suddenly cried, sneeringly ! "But, I'd rather be your captive than to be Luca's bride."

"Believe me, I will take you to Bonaparte's protection, with every consideration," I said, bowing.

At this she burst into a jeering but despairing laugh, then muttered falteringly : "I am at your orders."

With trembling hands, I was about to throw my cloak over her white and shining shoulders, to protect my lovely captive from the night air, when the heavy footsteps of Bronsard sounded at the door.

"Quick," cried the *maître d'armes*, saluting, "there is an alarm below !"



"I know it," I answered, "it is Luca's, who has escaped me!"

"Down that stairway?" asked the veteran.

I nodded.

Then we must have no attack in our rear! Quick, Sans-barbe, help me block it up."

With ready hands and soldierly instinct, the *maître d'armes*, and I both threw down the stairway, the lighter pieces of furniture in the room, then cushions, rugs and pillows to deaden pistol shots, next behind these, heavier articles; some couches and several chests of drawers; wedging these together with fagots which lay prepared on the open hearth.

Then we closed the strong oaken door and shot the heavy bolts which secured it. Bronsard turned to me and remarked: "*Parbleu!* they will not get through that without a battering ram. Now, boy, come quick."

But this precaution had stolen from us much precious time.

In a moment I had cloaked Lady Aliandra and with my arm about her slight waist half carried her into the main hall. But even as I did so a noise came to us through the great stairway running up from the banqueting room that indicated Luca and his followers were now up and doing.

"Tric-trac! Where is he?" I cried to Bronsard, hurriedly.

"He has gone to the rope ladder!"

"Then we must follow him quick. Now Lady Aliandra, to take you out of Luca's power."

"Out of his power?" she said suddenly. "Listen! Does that sound as if you were done with him?"

For at that instant there arose in our rear the clatter of numerous tramping feet approaching the great stairway.

"Hurry, Poignet!" I whispered to Bronsard, "I'll carry her down the rope ladder in my arms. Come!"

"Impossible!" answered the veteran turning back. "There's no time for that. They will be after us and cut the ladder from its fastenings on the walls before we were half way down. We would all be dashed to pieces against the cliffs. I'll stay here to keep this



rabble back till you escape. Be careful, and don't bruise your pretty prisoner's limbs on the rope ladder. Get the lady safe to our general and give her to Bonaparte with *mes adieux* !”

“You can't defend these broad stairs alone !” I cried. “Poignet d'Acier, I stay with you.” As I said this my arm released the Lady Aliandra. I drew my saber.

“*Parbleu*, if you wish it, Georges ! I like good company. It is what *your* father would have done, my boy,” and the old soldier patted my shoulder lovingly.

“You knew my father ?” I gasped. “Tell me of my birth.”

“Peste ! Why think of birth when death is before us ? We've time for nothing save to fight and die like soldiers of the Republic.”

“Then, *en avant* !” I ordered.

“Together, Georges !” said the old *maître d'armes*. And together we stepped to the head of the stairway and peered down. Some ten steps of descent, a broad landing, then some fifteen more led to the stone floor of the great hall below.

“We'll hold them at the landing !” muttered D'Acier. We sprang down, and were just in time, for at the very foot of the stairway stood Luca with his peasants and his bandits.

Confronted by us, they made pause, while I looked down upon a curious and impressive scene,

A hall of vast extent, lighted by blazing flambeaux, stuck in brackets round its walls ; one torch between each of its lofty gothic windows. The oak-beams, dark with age, of the high-arched Gothic roof indicated that this had been the banquet hall of the Campogiacintos from feudal times. Its appointments told the story of its ancient grandeur. On the walls behind the pillars, hung trophies of war and of the chase coming down from the middle ages ; suits of armor, plate and mail, weapons of every date and description ; skins of wild boars, pelts of great brown bears ; the heads of antlered stags, stuffed eagles, and other birds of prey ; even beside me on the landing, within hand reach, stood a case of weapons, sabers, rapiers, halberds and Spanish pikes in use a hundred years before.

From this my eyes, glancing to the floor again, could



see two oaken tables covered with remnants of a rugged banquet. Of meat and wine there was a plenty, though but little else. Beside them overturned chairs, thrown-down goblets of pewter, silver, and quaint Venetian glass, antique stools tossed to one side, platters of half-devoured meat, all showed that Luca's followers had been hurriedly called from their merry carouse in honor of the coming bride, to capture the two soldiers who now stared at them from the landing, some fifteen feet above their heads.

In the background peasant women, from one of the great openings of the room peered with pale faces cautiously in. With them stood a pallid-faced friar, who, doubtless, had been summoned to make my lovely prisoner Count Luca's bride. Nearer to us, at the foot of the stairs, tramping with their great feet the massive flagstone floor fixed by the wear of centuries, was Count Luca and as savage a crowd of bravos as ever cut a throat or butchered a convoy, though a few of them seemed honest mountaineers and dogged peasants.

Little time was given me to admire them. The Barbets were too near. The foremost, a gigantic figure of a man waving a heavy saber, was in the act of springing upon the staircase. I aimed to plant my bullet between his eyes—but held my fire. I knew the face.

"Back, Rocco!" I cried impulsively. "For the sake of your old mother, let some one else come first!"

The young giant stopped as if some great unseen hand had held him fast in his tracks.

"*Diavolo!*" he called out, "I know that voice. I could never forget it! 'Tis the girl-faced soldier who, nevertheless, killed his dog comrade at my mother's cottage!"

"Since you know me, keep back. I don't want your blood on my hands," I warned him again.

"Nor do I wish you to have it there. Besides, since it's *you*, there is no hurry. The *contessa* is in no danger, my brothers," he cried, turning to the rest, "This soldier once braved a dozen of his comrades for her sake."

Amazed the Italians stopped and hesitated. The



voice of Count Luca sharply recalled them to their senses.

"They intend to hold the stairs," he cried. "*Gran Dio!* Riddle them both and make—Hold! Thunder of heaven! let no one dare to pull trigger! Are you mad, Aliandra! Away from there, do you hear! To your room, girl, you cannot save him! Hold your fire, I tell you men, a ball might strike *her!*"

"I will not go back, Luca;" came in the sweet voice of the *contessa* from behind me. "No, *Monsieur Luc*, not for you either! If I stand here, they will not dare to shoot *you!*"

Something in her voice made me love my life as I had never thought to love it.

"They will have to depend on their swords, you and your comrade will still have some chance!" cried the girl excitedly.

"What! are *you* on their side, Aliandra!" came to us in the astonished cry of Rocco from below.

"They are my friends, Rocco, they fight for me," she answered.

"Then I fight for you also!" shouted the young mountaineer rushing up to where we stood.

"He means it, believe me; trust him! don't kill him!" Aliandra faltered.

"We believe you, *mademoiselle!*" muttered the *maître d'armes*.

"You shall act as our reserve, Rocco," I hastily told him. "I'll keep the right of the staircase; Renaud, you answer for the left. Do you stand between us, a pace to the rear. If one of them succeeds in passing our front see that he does no harm."

A nod and a grin from the son of Giannetta assured me that he understood my orders. Then I turned my eyes to the Barbets, who, clustered about Count Luca and Giacomo, were cursing the traitor.

"Short work, my men!" cried Luca, as his followers formed in column of threes, displaying in the action more military training than I had supposed them to possess.

Without question, they were enemies not to be laughed at. Lowering, vindictive, their bearded faces showed by the light of the torches, the brawny arms, revealed by their rolled-back sleeves, gave promise of



abundant strength to wield the glittering sabers and cutlasses they held. 'Twas plain that stern work lay before us.

"Fire in turn, Renaud," I warned the *maître d'armes*. "We must not waste a bullet."

The shout of Count Luca's command rang through the hall, and his followers charged silently upon the staircase.

My first shot brought down the man on my side of the leading three, as they reached the foot of the ascent. Five steps up and the outward file on the opposite flank fell before the pistol of Poignet d'Acier. Upon the landing, the last of those who headed the column received my second bullet. Again the *maître d'armes* fired with deadly effect, and then there was only time for steel. The space we defended was wide enough to give free swing to our weapons. The Italians charged it with desperate fury; but they had to deal with the best swordsman of the Army of Italy and his favorite pupil.

The first who came at me, run through the chest, rolled back down the stairs. Two supplied his place on the instant, hacking and stabbing at me together. I gave back a step. Two swift passes and a straight thrust in tierce rid me of one. As my blade passed through his body the Barbets broke and hastily recoiled down the stairs.

That the *maître d'armes* had been busy, the writhing forms that littered the steps before him amply proved.

"*Parbleu!* Georges," he laughed as our enemies fell back. "If Count Luca keeps this up much longer we'll soon be able to fight on equal terms!"

And Count Luca meant to keep it up! With savage reproaches and frenzied curses he encouraged his men, and ere we had time to reload our pistols they rushed again to the onset. I saw the head of Renaud's first adversary swept clean off his shoulders by an exquisitely scientific side cut. As I engaged the man who fell to me, another Barbet dropped under Poignet d'Acier's terrible blade, and at the same time one of his comrades dashed between us. Scarcely had my brain received the fact when I caught a glimpse of his horrible countenance as he rolled dead to the ready weapon of the peasant Rocco. I stretched my opponent beside



him ; yet before the rush of the rest both Renaud and myself were borne back.

Then upon that landing of the stairs ensued a struggle grim and bloody. With the energy of men who fight for life we struck and warded, lunged and guarded in sullen silence. The crowding mass of our assailants that for the moment had had its effect, now hampered their movements. Fiercely we plied them and though the Barbets were brave, they could not advance farther. They fought well, but one after another their most daring spirits sank to the floor. The perspiration was rolling across my face and my sword-arm was aching sadly when they hesitated and ceased to press us. With one stern shout that seemed to burst by common impulse from our panting lungs we leaped at them and hurled them down the stairs once more. Gasping, breathless, yet still victorious, we exchanged hearty grips of the hand.

"You are a man, Rocco !" the *maître d'armes* remarked quietly to the mountaineer, then smiled grimly at Count Luca who one moment was appealing to his band, the next was imploring Aliandra to leave the upper stairway from which, leaning against the marble balustrade like a statue, she had gazed upon the combat.

"Aliandra, to thy chamber !" he cried, commandingly. "For the Virgin, step from the line of fire so without danger to you we dare use bullets on these men who slay us. *Mi adorata!* can't you see that villain Frenchman is taking you to the vengeance of the French?"

In answer, her voice rang clear and disdainful : "Better the punishment of Bonaparte than to be the bride of Luca !"

At this the count uttered an awful cry !

"The sans culotte fiend is taking her to be the prey of his general !" he screamed, "and *madre mia*, she is *willing* to go !"

Despite the wrongs this man had done my comrades, his grief and despair, told in the excitable manner these Italians have, almost made me pity him.

He clapped his hands together and implored his beaten bandits to make in upon us again, crying : "Save your mistress, curs, from French outrage ! *Gran*



*Dio!* save your beloved lady from the pollution of Bonaparte!"

At this the girl, though she still kept her post, uttered a sob of affrighted modesty, and clasped her hands upon her burning face and bowed her head; as moved by his appeals, the unfortunate bravos a third time stormed our position.

While Luca had argued and implored we had recharged our firearms. The volley that met them was itself sufficient to break their charge. They scattered and gave back ere they were half-way up the steps.

The rage of Count Luca was indescribable. He cursed his discouraged minions by all the saints in the calendar.

"You cowards! you miserable cowards!" he yelled.

"*Hola! monsieur le comte*, not so fast there," Poignet d'Acier called out as the Barbet chieftain paused for breath. "'Tis easy enough for you to storm at the poor devils! Had *you* tried our mettle as closely as they have, mayhap you'd be more of their way of thinking."

"You mean by that?" Count Luca cried savagely.

"That it doesn't sound well for you to call your ragamuffins 'cowards' when you take precious good care not to venture your own skin," the *maître d'armes* retorted.

The count returned no immediate answer to his taunt.

With folded arms he gazed at us for a time and then began pacing the floor. We watched his tall figure by the lessening blaze of the flambeaux that, unfed and neglected, were momentarily decreasing in brightness. At length he appeared to have arrived at a satisfactory solution of the problem before him.

Advancing slowly to the foot of the stairs he called in a voice from which every trace of anger had disappeared:

"I have a proposition to make you, lieutenant,—for I believe that I must give you that rank now," he added with a smile.

"Quite correct, *monsieur*," I answered. "Say on."

"The matter between us two had better be settled to-night once for all," he continued. "Had you contrived to hold me in arrest, Bonaparte would have



finished your work for you. Had you and your comrade been worse swordsmen than you are, my followers had done as much for me. Let us terminate the affair ourselves, since others are not likely to conclude it."

"And how?" I demanded.

"By fighting it out until one of us dies. I am armed with but a rapier. Seize a similar weapon from the stand beside you. Descend to the hall and I swear to you that you will be met only by my single blade. If you conquer me you shall be at liberty to depart unharmed. Giacomo will see that my order to that effect is obeyed. You hear, Giacomo?"

I laughed as the innkeeper grunted assent.

"Fools are not wont to ride with my regiment, my dear count," I cried. "Your proposition is tempting, but I must decline it. We stay where we are. If you are inclined to come to us, *en avant*. We'll make you welcome."

But Poignet d'Acier interposed. "With your permission, my officer," he said, "I will avenge upon this man the treacherous doing to death of our comrades at the inn of Giacomo." Without waiting for my word, he tore from the stand beside us, a rapier of Spanish make, and causing his blade to form a half circle from the flagging to his hand, laughed, "As good a Toledo as I ever grasped. At your service, Monsieur le Comte!" then begged eagerly:

"Accept, Georges, accept!"

So after a short discussion of the conditions of the combat the matter was decided. Giacomo swore by the Virgin that should Count Luca fall, no hand would be raised to prevent our departure.

"Take care of your mistress, Rocco!" I whispered. Then Poignet d'Acier and I came down the stairs, for I had determined to guard him from treacherous assault by others of Count Luca's band.

As they fronted each other under the blaze of the flambeaux, methought all the beauties who had gazed in that grand banquet hall, upon the heroes of the age of chivalry, could scarce have beheld a more martial pair of champions.

Count Luca had removed his coat and waistcoat, and his shirtsleeve was rolled high up on his right arm,



leaving it bare to the shoulder. Save discarding his shako and saber-belt, Poignet d'Acier had made no preparations for the combat.

Stamping his foot Count Luca placed himself on guard.

With stern politeness Poignet d'Acier made him a fencing-room salute.

Neither wasted time in "feeling" the powers of his antagonist. Instantly Luca feinted and lunged savagely in high tierce. The riposte of Poignet d'Acier was swift and true, but the Italian joined to the eye of a tiger a wrist of steel, and the point of the *maître d'armes* he turned aside.

Back the count came again to the lunge; again his thrust failed and again he parried the counter of his opponent. A close rally followed, while the blades changed from side to side of each other so swiftly that the eye could not follow them, yet neither man was touched. It ended by a straight lunge from Luca that the *maître d'armes* evaded by a rapid side-step, and again they were at the guard.

To it they went afresh, feigning and parrying, thrusting and guarding with such ferocity that it seemed at every pass as if one or both must fall. The red light of the torches caught the steel of the rapiers and turned them into blades of fire. The two men sought each other's lives with weapons of flame. At times a blazing streak would dart from the hand of one straight at the breast of the other, deflect, pass on and spring back as the attempt was foiled. Once the point of Renaud Bronsard whipped in over Count Luca's guard like the tongue of a serpent; but an agile backward leap saved the Barbet chieftain from the death it carried.

Throughout the great hall no sound was heard save the stamp of the duellists and the grinding clash of steel. Mute and absorbed in the combat, I and the banditti were motionless, gazing alike with bated breaths upon the prowess and peril of our respective champions. Though both fought with the same deadly intent to slay, there was a marked difference in the demeanor of the combatants.

With the energy of hatred betokened in every line of form and countenance, Count Luca wielded his rapier.



His eyes blazed like diamonds set in the enamel of his white face, upon his thin lips there sat a savage, ill-boding smile, and his graceful body appeared as if likely to be rent asunder from the force with which he sent in his lunges. Superbly as he fenced, every movement in his brilliant swordsmanship carried with it the impression that the man was putting forth all his energies, that he was drawing upon forces that must in time become exhausted.

Renaud Bronsard, on the contrary, appeared to be totally free from emotion. Resolute and intrepid indeed he looked, but that was the ordinary expression of the valiant *maître d'armes* of the regiment Damremont. Though his passes were fully as well meant as those of his opponent, they apparently cost him much less effort. He fenced with the method and accuracy of some deadly machine. The spring of his lunges never bore his right foot an inch too far to the front, his steady eyes stared into the fierce orbs of Count Luca with unchanging, impassive watchfulness, and the guards that turned aside the hostile blade were never a hair's breadth too wide.

Indeed it seemed to me that Poignet d'Acier had fallen into the error of parrying too closely. At the end of a puzzling series of feints and thrusts, Count Luca hurled himself forward with the energy of a demon, putting all the power in his frame behind his point. The end of the rapier ground to the sharpness of a needle, ripped a long gash in the breast of the green jacket and grazed Renaud Bronsard's chest.

His narrow escape from death in no way affected the *maître d'armes*, his eye was cold and his wrist as firm as ever. But a new might seemed to swell the muscles and inspire the heart of Campogiacinto. Closer and closer he pressed, engaging the weapons to the very guards, yet protecting himself with a skill that seemed more than human. Before his assault Poignet d'Acier was gradually forced back. Little by little he gave ground, circling imperceptibly to the right and rear. Presently they had almost changed positions, and though Count Luca had faced me when the duel began my eyes now rested on the white shirt that covered his back.

For the first time since their weapons crossed, doubt



sprang up in my heart. *Could it be that Poignet d'Acier had met his match?*

The point of the *maître d'armes* sunk to a feint in low tierce, shifted over the hostile blade to a thrust in carte, and was deftly turned aside by the pliant wrist of Count Luca. To the upper guards the rapiers flamed again, the steel of Renaud Bronsard played about the weapon of his adversary with the dazzling rapidity of lightning flickering along the horizon on a sultry summer evening, and then in perfect time with hand and foot the whole body of the *maître d'armes* shot forward to the lunge. With the action, two feet of thin, reeking steel seemed to spring out between the shoulders of Campogiacinto, showed for a second, and vanished as Poignet d'Acier swung back into position as if moved by accurately balanced machinery.

The rapier fell from Count Luca's hand, he plunged to the left for three reeling paces, then, with a muttered gasping sigh, crashed heavily down upon the pitiless stone flags that paved the hall.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AGRICOLA DOES HIS GRAND ACT.

SUDDENLY I shouted with all the energy in my lungs, "To the stairs, Renaud. They mean mischief!" For the fight had drawn us well into the hall. At the fall of his master Giacomo had raised a shrill scream and was leaping toward us across the flagging, followed by the rest of the Barbets.

Renaud Bronsard did not even turn his head, but acted upon my warning immediately. As he came abreast of me I thrust his saber into his hand and rushed for the staircase a couple of paces in his rear.

The dawn had stolen upon us unawares and from the last great window toward the south, in the eastern wall, a broad patch of gray light fell across the flags, contrasting curiously with the bloody glare of the torches. As I crossed it I slipped and fell at full length, bruising my body sadly against the unyielding stones.

I was scrambling to my feet, when Giacomo, bran-



dishing a heavy cutlass, rushed upon me with the fury of a madman, a score of bounds ahead of his attendant bandits.

My saber had escaped my hand in my fall, but the knot about my wrist had prevented my losing it. Into my grasp I twitched the hilt and, still kneeling, was upon my guard. I met and parried his first sweeping cut, which descended straight from above like a thunderbolt. *Sacre!* but the old villain was strong! My fingers tingled and my arm stung to the elbow.

The cutlass rose in the air again, falling in another downward blow, that, beating down my saber, drove it from my grasp. Disarmed, I strove to spring from my knees at the bandit's throat, but the innkeeper, who seemed to have a giant's strength, held me off with one arm, and with the other raised his weapon to give me death.

The flashing steel was in my eyes; a faint cry piercing the air came from the lips of Aliandra—when suddenly—there was a noise upon the stairs above, a huge, ungainly hairy shape sprang nimbly through the crowd of astonished Barbets, a great hairy hand upraised above me plucked the saber from the astonished Giacomo and dragged him from me. This was accompanied by a rumbling inhuman roar.

The excited peasants halted in their rush, shrinking back with frightened ejaculations and cries of superstitious dismay.

I myself, overcome by amazement, staggered up, then stood as if rooted in my tracks. Between us in the unearthly light engendered by the mingling of the pale beams of the rising sun and the red rays of the burning flambeaux, the innkeeper was struggling furiously in the mighty arms of the ape Agricola. Like one in a dream I watched the terrible conflict that was in progress within three yards of where I stood. I could hear the panting breaths drawn by Giacomo, the vindictive oaths he never ceased to mingle with his efforts to tear himself free. At intervals, too, boomed forth the sullen, chattering growl of the ape. Clapsed in his awful embrace I judged that there could be little chance for the landlord.

Meanwhile there was the tramp of booted feet along the stone passage-way above. The welcome column of



my gallant green-clad *chasseurs* came swiftly springing down the long flight of steps. The voice of Pierre Santron shouted "Halt! front!" and with rapid salute he turned over the command to me, then cried "*Diablo!*" For even the war-worn faces of my hardened veterans betrayed surprise at the strange combat between man and beast that now was going on so fast and furious upon the flagging of that giant hall. As for the Barbets they were as if turned to stone. They must have taken the appearance of the monkey as a direct visitation of heaven, a punishment sent by God upon Giacomo for violating the oath he had sworn not to molest us in case Count Luca fell.

With affrighted eyes and trembling limbs they gazed at their leader's despairing fight for life.

Agricola raised one huge paw and brought it down upon the white-locked head. Screaming hoarsely to the saints, Giacomo reeled and tottered, the ape above him, jibbering with rage.

The walls that held us seemed to fling back with pitiless glee the noise the beast and his victim made in their fall. Though prone on the floor the old innkeeper did not immediately succumb. For some moments his shocking execrations rang in our ears, changing finally into piercing shrieks of terror and appeals for aid wild and fear-stricken as the yells of some tortured soul from the lowest depths where dwell the damned; the rattle of his boot-heels beating a horrible tattoo upon the pavement sounded a sharp accompaniment to the expiring cries that grew feebler with every instant. Of a sudden they ceased—the hoarse jibbering of the ape became a scream of triumph.

"*Chasseurs!*" I thundered, "*attention to the command to fire! Aim,—fire!*"

The carbines spoke, the hall was filled with smoke and the screams of the stricken Barbets.

"Upon them now. Take them alive if you can, but slay all who resist," I ordered.

Short work did my willing cavalrymen make of the remnant of Count Luca's band. Dismayed and cowed, the bandits who had escaped the volley were quickly secured. Among the prisoners was Pippo, the last remaining son of Giacomo.

"Well done, Pierre Santron," I cried, clapping that



red-polled sergeant heartily upon the back. "Thy march to our rescue, I shall not forget in my report, be assured."

"Tric-trac must come in for a share of the praise, Sans-barbe. Had he not hastened to meet us and show us the road we'd still be on the way," Santron rejoined.

"And Citizen Agricola should have *thy* best thanks, Georges," put in Poignet d'Acier who just then joined us. "Giacomo had done for thee without the ape."

"True enough, Renaud," I owned. "The devotion of sincere friendship I henceforth swear to Monsieur Agricola."

"Giacomo must have been one of those who beat Agricola. The ape is a beast of most tender honor!" laughed the *maître d'armes*.

But I answered him not. My gaze was on the Lady Aliandra. The girl seated upon the stone floor, was supporting in her lap the head of the Count Luca Campogiacinto, who appeared to be sunk in a swoon. By her side Tric-trac had taken his position, and was bending eagerly forward to watch the death-damp gather upon the brow of the man he hated most on earth. A few feet away crouched the great ape, with crimsoned paws and ensanguined muzzle. Beyond, near the table, a group of *chasseurs* surrounding the Barbet prisoners, now securely bound, gazed with silent interest upon the strange scene, plain and clear under the glare of the torches that still flamed from the iron brackets on the pillars.

Aided by the priest who had joined her, the lovely *contessa* strove to bring back to life the dark spirit of her cousin. For a long time her efforts were fruitless. A faint movement of the heart and occasionally a scarcely perceptible gasping sigh alone told that Count Luca still belonged to the world.

"It seems to be of no use, Monsieur Luc," she said tearfully, raising her swimming eyes to mine. "Oh! it is terrible that he should die thus unshriven and unrepentant! I would not have it so. Can you do nothing to aid me?"

"Let me try my hand, *contessa*," Poignet d'Acier said, advancing, and placing his hand upon the icy forehead of the count.

As if his body unconsciously rebelled at the touch



of the man before whose deadly rapier he had fallen Count Luca stirred.

His head twitched aside from the fingers of the *maître d'armes*, a spasm contorted the muscles of his face, he opened his eyes and rolled them vacantly about him.—Then, even as the priest made sign of the cross over him, a terrible cry of hopeless, impenitent fury was rent from his pierced chest, and the last of the Barbet chieftains lay cold and motionless forever beneath the roof of his ancestors.

Gazing at the corpse of his foe, the juggler moaned to me: "Alas! my enemy never knew that it was to me—a man he thought already in the grave by his treachery—he owed his ruin and his death. Then Tric-trac burst forth in horrible bitterness, "*Miséricorde!* My vengeance will now *forever* be incomplete!"

Turning from the mountebank's face of cruel passion I gave a shudder. *I* had a cruel duty to perform to the woman I loved—*my prisoner!*

Stepping to her as she stood weeping by her guardian's body,—for women forgive even crime if caused by love of them,—I gently drew her away.

"We will leave here," I murmured, "as soon as the horses can be brought up."

"A-a-h," she looked at me for a moment uncomprehendingly, then suddenly my meaning burst upon her. "Yes, I understand!" she whispered "I am your captive, I must go with you."

"Those were orders from headquarters, but first I pray you go to your room where you can take rest and refreshment before your journey."

Stooping and giving the lips of the dead man one kiss, she turned and with a sigh accompanied me. Each movement of her exquisite body had now a sad grace, that made me tender to her.

"If you will give me your parole, Lady Aliandra," I ventured, as I strode beside her, "to remain under my charge until I have delivered you to Bonaparte, rescue or no rescue, you will be absolutely free from all surveillance from my men, or unasked attention from me, until I have fulfilled my mission and surrendered you to my general."

Suddenly a flash of intelligence lighted her piquant face, the girl turned inquiring eyes upon me.



"You are the officer specially charged to capture me?" She asked hurriedly.

"Yes, *mademoiselle*!" I faltered.

"You accepted the order; *you*, the man who said he loved—" she checked herself and drew herself up haughtily; though tears stood in her grand eyes and her red lips were whimpering.

"You will give me your parole?" I begged.

"Never!" She drew herself up like a queen. "It is an insult for a man of your class to ask oath from a woman of my rank. Never, citizen!"

"Then, Lady Aliandra, you force me to place a sentry at the door of your chamber," I faltered, with thick tongue, and downcast, haggard eyes. "Please give me your word!"

We were already at the entrance of her boudoir. The girl turned upon me with flashing eyes. Standing within the doorway, she cried in hasty anger: "Never!"

I bowed before her.

"Still any wish except your personal liberty, will be my command," I muttered hanging my head.

"Then please permit me the attendance of my maid."

"She shall be sent to you, *mademoiselle*."

"Also grant a decent burial to my dead relative below."

"It shall be done! But for God's sake!" I pleaded, "give me your parole. Don't force me to make a captive of the woman I—"

"Of la Contessa Campogiacinto!" she uttered haughtily, then whispering with haughty anger, "Give my word to a *sans-culotte*? Never!" She stepped into her chamber and the door closing after her, shut out the presence that I loved.

With heavy heart I turned away and shortly finding the peasant girl who waited on Aliandra, sent her to her mistress with every dainty that I could find within the castle-larder. Then acting on my promise, I gave proper funeral to the remains of Luca Campogiacinto, and as soon as this was over, reminded by Poignet d'Acier of my orders as to captive bandits, I sent the prisoners of Luca's band after their late leader. It was done in the angle of the wall where we had entered



the place, the rope ladder furnishing nooses in abundance.

This being over I allowed the chasseurs to rest ; but after the sun had passed the meridian, I ordered a dozen files to return to our mountain bivouac and to bring back with them our horses ; for the march to my rescue had been made on foot.

Then I passed a miserable hour. She was my prisoner, and I, who loved her, the instrument that would lead her to punishment. My spirits were not raised by the remarks of honest peasant Rocco, who sauntered to me and chatted of the being I loved, telling me of her goodness to the peasants, of the noble nature of his foster-sister.

"*Diable !* how she pleaded for your life even after the fearful insult of your fellows, *Signor Luc*, when Giacomo proposed putting you all to death," the boy remarked.

"Yes, I know," I muttered. Then anxious to get rid of the torturing babble of the peasant lad, I strolled out on the ramparts.

Here my men, in the careless manner of soldiers were making a hero of the giant ape.

"*Parbleu !* Tric-trac," guffawed Santron, "that was a grand act of Citizen Agricola. But he will require a *new* actor to play the scene with him every time he gives a performance."

Their mirth jarred on me.

Soon I must set out to carry the woman I loved to the merciless Bonaparte, who forgave no one of those who had aroused the peasants and thus delayed his operations against the Austrians. What punishment would he decree for the beautiful *contessa* ? What fate awaited Aliandra ?

"She saved my life twice. He shall not harm her ! He shall not !" I muttered to myself. "If all other means fail I will try *this* !"

By the tricolor, there was mutiny in my thoughts ! I found myself grasping the handle of my saber !



## CHAPTER XXV.

## NOT TO THE MARQUIS—TO THE MAN!

Two hours after this the detachment returned with our horses. Ordering my men to lunch, I directed that additional refreshment be carried to the *contessa*.

I must get to Milan as soon as possible. On that point my orders were imperative; besides there might be danger of ambush in the mountains if I delayed too long. Therefore, some few minutes after, I ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of Lady Aliandra.

"Who is there?" the voice I loved most on earth cried from within.

"It is I, *mademoiselle*," I answered. "I come to request that in an hour you will be ready for the road. Doubtless you have a riding-habit?"

"And in that case, *monsieur*—pardon, I should say *citizen*, I suppose."

"You will please don it for the journey. There are no carriages in the stables and in consequence you must travel on horseback.

"Your prisoner will obey your will, citizen. Please leave me, I have much to make ready in the short space you allow me."

Returning to the hall I was accosted by Sergeant Pierre Santron.

"All is prepared for our departure, lieutenant," he reported. Then, dropping his official tone for the familiar speech of an old comrade, "Thy visit to the beauty up yonder was but brief, Sans-barbe. She'd not let thee console her, eh? *Morbleu*, a pity that such a grand bit of Eve's flesh should be left alone here in this pile of old rocks!"

"Which will not happen, so don't waste thy sympathy," I returned. "When we leave she goes with us. A prisoner she is, Pierre Santron, by express order of the Little Corporal. And so, sergeant, you will have an eye upon her and take the greatest care that she has no opportunity to escape!" I ordered sharply.

For even then I had a wild and desperate idea in my



head. Apparent sternness to my captive might prevent suspicion of me by my men.

The last words, uttered in the curt accents of duty, Pierre Santron was not the man to let go unheeded,

When the *contessa* at last came down the staircase, arrayed in a riding-dress that made her doubly adorable, kept by a feeling of delicacy, I made no undue haste to approach my beautiful prisoner; though the sergeant was prompt in meeting her at the bottom. I noticed that he carried a small coil of stout cord, still I did not suspect his intention. I was not long to remain in ignorance.

"You're here at last, then," he cried roughly. "I've orders from the lieutenant to make you safe, so prepare to be tied immediately."

She turned deadly white, and flashed an amazed and reproachful look in my direction. With the mien of a captive goddess she extended her tender wrists.

"No, you little rebel! Put your hands behind your back, so I can truss you up like a pullet going to market," Santron commanded.

"Gently there, sergeant!" I screamed running forward, then commanded, hoarse with rage: "You may retire for a few moments. I have a word to say to the prisoner."

He hulked away, and Aliandra turned upon me in a rush of scorn.

"You may spare your words. I guess what you would say, *monsieur*. Your brutal demonstration of your power has made me know you. It will be useless for you to try threats to obtain the love I would not accord to your entreaties. Take me to General Bonaparte with all speed, I say. I am nerved to meet him. *You* I would not hold viler than I do now, for I—no matter, only be sure you cannot move me from my resolution."

"The proposal I have to make you is not what you imagine, Lady Aliandra," I replied coldly. "It is simply that you give me your word to accompany us as our prisoner, rescue or no rescue. In that case no restraint will you have to undergo. I would make the march as light as possible for you. Therefore, again I ask for your parole."

"That I refuse to give to the slave of the tyrant!"



"But you shall not," I cried imploringly. "You *must* give it."

"I *must*? For what reason?"

"For the reason that I love you."

"Bah! By every path you would arrive at the same end, I see, *citizen*," she retorted bitterly. "*You* love me! You! a soldier of Bonaparte? You! one of the off-scouring who assassinated their king! You, whose black blood flowed in the sedges of an ignoble peasantry, aspire to me, the daughter of a race of nobles!"

"Your word, *contessa*," I murmured patiently.

"I will not give it. Call your brute of a sergeant, that he may truss me like a pullet—those were his words, I believe. The pledge of Aliandra di Campogiacinto is not to be held by such *canaille* as you!"

The quick-eared Renaud Bronsard was standing not many yards away. Several long strides placed him beside us.

"What is all this that I hear?" he inquired, gazing intently into my crimsoned face. "Dost love her, Georges, this woman here?"

"Aye, that I do, Renaud," I answered, "but—"

"Tell her so, then, and let's have the men mount. Thou canst ride by her side and say all thy pretty speeches on the road."

"'Tis no question of that, Renaud," I burst out. "I wish her to give parole, and she refuses."

"On what grounds?" the *maître d'armes* demanded.

"Because I am not noble. She holds that one of her rank would too highly honor a soldier of the republic in stooping to grant him a promise."

"Honor! *Sang-dieu!* to think of that! You are of as high a race as this *contessa*, Georges, aye, of higher for that matter!"

"*What!*" I cried with sudden amazement, followed by swift conviction as Poignet d'Acier paused abruptly and bit his lip, like one who has caught himself in a mistake. "You know my parents, Renaud? I am sure of it! You have betrayed yourself! Out with the story now, if ever thy Georges was dear to thee!"

"Since thou hast an inkling of the fact, 'tis plain I'd have no peace did I refuse," he said slowly. "I had thought to keep the secret and wait for the day when thou'dst be certain of coming to thine own. Mean-



while thy rise in the profession of arms could do thee no harm. I have smiled often to myself, Georges, as I saw thee strive to play the *sans-culotte*. 'Twas vain, boy, for thou'rt an aristocrat to the core. Thou art son to one of whom thou hast often heard me speak, of that captain under whom I served in the days when none but nobles held commissions in the army of France."

"Thou'rt positive!" I cried.

"Certain as the victories of the Little Corporal. On the day when I saw thee first in Paris I knew in thee the look of my old commander. There's a toss of the head, a curl of the lip I'd recognize anywhere. Thy chatter concerning the Rigauds put me upon the clue, and I made investigation, careful, legal. Thy parentage is proved and sworn to in the old notary Margon's on the Rue St. Antoine. I did this for thee, Georges, before I left Paris for the Rhine campaign. Thy father foresaw the revolution. When the Bastille fell he put thee, for thy own safety, in charge of the woodcutter and his wife. The danger passed, he meant to reclaim thee, but he went to the guillotine during the Terror. Then those to whom he trusted thee turned harsh. The rest needs no telling."

"His name, my father's name, Renaud," I demanded. "Thou sayest he was of noble blood?"

"Of a lineage proud as the Rohans, lofty as the Montmorencies. Though but a lieutenant of *chasseurs*, thou'rt Georges Bertrand de Gontran, Marquis de St. Luc!"

"Ah, 'twas *that* thou whispered to Bonaparte on the night I first saw him," I rejoined.

"Thou hast guessed, Georges," the *maître d'armes* made answer.

All at once my heart welled with self-reproach.

"Wretch that I am!" I ejaculated. "I forget. Thou hast spoken of my father, Renaud Bronsard. What of my mother? Where is *she*?"

The *maître d'armes* sunk his eyes to the contemplation of his heavy boots.

"Dost recall that thou once spoke to me of a woman, Georges, a woman whom thou sawest die under the guillotine while the hands of a complacent *sans-culotte* held thee above the throng? Dost remember her, thy



woman of the *Place de la Révolution* ? thy lady of the long, fair hair ? ”

“ Aye, I remember. What of her ? ” I forced out the question in a voice that was barely a whisper.

“ She was thy mother, Georges, *la Marquise de St. Luc*. There is no doubt, my proof is undeniable.”

Abruptly I turned my face away, and stood with clenched hands and heaving chest. Great tears gathered in my eyes. She was my mother, that wonderful vision I had carried in my heart so long ! Even from her home among the angels she had cast her loving care about her son ! She was my mother, *grand Dieu !* She was my mother, and I had seen her murdered !

Then, the well-spring of my heart hardened by military routine, and brutalized by the carnage of war broke forth, and I, a stern trooper of Bonaparte, sobbed like an infant.

A moment later a soft little hand was placed timidly upon my arm.

“ I give you my parole. I am your prisoner, rescue or no rescue, monsieur ! ” the voice of the *contessa* said in low earnest tones.

“ So the Marquis de St. Luc is worthier to receive the word of Lady Aliandra than Lieutenant Sans-barbe, of the *chasseurs-à-cheval* ? ” I queried bitterly.

“ Not to the marquis I give my word,” she answered softly, “ but to the man ! Gentle or peasant, monsieur, you have a tender and a noble heart ! ”

What I saw in her eyes just then I cannot picture. It is not within the power of man to describe that one look belonging to woman.

But even as I gazed upon her, this awful thought struck down all joy. This beauty, these charms, this noble soul I must deliver to the mercy of a military despot who loves woman very ardently.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

“MY DUTY OR HER SHAME !”

ACCEPTING her parole as joyfully as my aching heart would allow, I had the men mount and gave the signal for instant departure.

Our fresh and vigorous steeds bore us speedily out of sight of the gloomy pile of stones wherein we had undergone such memorable experiences. Within an hour we had come to the cross-road of the valley and saw again before us the walls of the mountain inn where Roussel and the rest had died. Bidding Santron ride on with the greater part of the squad I halted with Poignet d'Acier and half-a-dozen *chasseurs*.

We made but a brief stay at the house of Giacomo ; yet we well accomplished the purpose of our visit. When we rode away the flames were roaring fiercely about the great stone walls that had witnessed the murder of our comrades.

Throughout the whole of the evening's march, the story of the *maître d'armes* gave me much food for thought. Grief for my slaughtered parents oppressed me. Yet mingling with my sorrow came always the remembrance that they had bequeathed to me a blood and a name that ranked with the noblest.

And I, the heretofore violent upholder of the Revolution, felt no depression at learning that I was an aristocrat. On the contrary, what I had despised I now held to be of priceless value. It made me the equal of Aliandra.

Three hours riding and we were well upon our way to the plains of Italy. That night my lovely prisoner slept in the only chamber of a little farmhouse, my men and I making bivouac upon the ground outside. But though the sod I lay upon was no harder than ground I had thought soft enough a hundred times within the year, I could not sleep.

The pale face and beautiful eyes of my captive as I had just escorted her to the farmhouse rose up before me. Her shrinking bashfulness as I had lifted her ex-



quisite form from the saddle, her blushing face, her trembling hand, her drooping head slightly turned from me as I bowed before her at the entrance of the house, the soft faltering tones in which with appealing yet piteous smile she asked me, "At what time must I arise to-morrow morning, monsieur le marquis?" made me think she feared me as her jailer, that her timidity arose from the knowledge that I had military authority over her.

Fool that I was! In those days I knew but little of women and their ways. But I was about to receive instructions in that line.

Next morning found us again on our way to Milan.

By every means in my power I contrived that the tender limbs of the Lady Aliandra, should be spared all unnecessary fatigue. Daily we took the road at a late hour in the morning, proceeding with frequent halts and restings, and completed our march long before sunset.

Distasteful and irksome indeed the journey must have seemed to my dashing, dare-devils of *chasseurs*, who, with shakos pushed off their foreheads, feet swinging free from their stirrups, pipes in mouth, jackets unbuttoned, sat their horses in the loosest fashion and under their breaths cursed the plodding walk to which their leader's fancy condemned them.

These ready war-dogs ever lusted for danger, and pined to be once more with the army where peril was rife and glory was to be gained.

But if *they* suffered under the torment of their impatience, their officer whom they blamed for their delay underwent tortures of the damned.

For, from now on, the Lady Aliandra made it plain to me that the relations between us were to be henceforth those of captive and jailer. Not once did she address me, except in answer to questions directly put. My solicitous inquiries as to the comfort of her saddle, the gait of her horse, her choice of the hour for beginning or terminating the day's march, the accommodations granted her when we came to the night's resting-place—all were replied to with a patient pride that said, in a way more cutting than the words themselves would have done, "*Monsieur*, I beg you do not trouble me."



My aid in mounting or alighting from her horse she invariably managed to evade, summoning Poignet d'Acier or even the red-haired Santron to her assistance with a kindness of voice that made her cold manner to me much cooler by contrast.

Heavens and earth, did she like their attentions better than my own? I cursed beneath my breath. For I betrayed not my misery. My pride would not let me show her how her conduct pained me. With unfailing patience I met her almost hourly acts of slight. To my torment sometimes I caught the jeers of my men who in their rough way guessed my passion.

It was not joy to hear old Mauran mutter: "*Tonne de Ciel*, the haughty minx will not be as distant to our all-conquering general as she is to a lieutenant of *chasseurs*."

But all the time there was a strange pity in my heart for the girl as I looked upon her supreme beauty, for now we were approaching Milan, and I shuddered; "Bonaparte! *what will he do with her?*"

So we came into the capital of Lombardy to find the commander-in-chief had gone to the front, and also to hear strange rumors of reverses to our arms. The sullen attitude of the people in the streets confirmed these; but Poignet d'Acier and I would not believe, even a check could come to Bonaparte and the Army of Italy.

"There is a strange tale though about 'Le Petit Corporal,'" muttered the *maître d'armes*. "They say that he is out of sorts."

"He is ill?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes! heartsick! 'Tis the gibe here, that a certain dancer, La Favorita, of wondrous beauty, after making Bonaparte forget his marriage vows, has slighted our general even to his face."

"Slighted *him*! Could the courtesan dare? How? Why?" cried Santron angrily.

"Why? *Parbleu!* This is the most incredible part of it!" guffawed D'Acier. "La Favorita's serving-wench declares that ever since one day her mistress put eyes on some unknown sergeant of *chasseurs*, the dancer has refused the love of any one."

In this part of the conversation I did not join, though at the mention of a sergeant of *chasseurs* my cheeks



grew flaming red, perchance because I saw a strange look in the fair face of my captive as she rode beside me; for now we had left Milan, my orders being to take my prisoner to Bonaparte in *person*, and he was on the Mincio preparing to meet the Austrian veteran Wurmser, that energetic warrior having with eighty thousand men debouched from the Tyrol to raise the siege of Mantua.

Upon the line of the river, made famous by past victories, Bonaparte, with forty thousand awaited his approach.

Therefore I had ridden out of Milan and was headed for Borghetto to do my orders and deliver up to his punishment, the lovely girl who rode beside me. Yet as I looked upon her beauty, despair was in my soul, and this day into my head came a wild scheme of mutiny, for as we rode I noted that Lady Aliandra had begun to droop.

A strange pathetic look had come into her face; her eyes had shame in them as well as despair. Did she fear the vengeance of Bonaparte, or his lust, or *both*?

Could I be instrument to deliver this being that I adored, to cruel punishment or brutal outrage?

So we pressed on, always getting near to the French, and also *to the Austrians*!

After passing Lodi on the 14th Thermidor, we heard as we rode, far away towards the east, the unmistakable jarring growl of the cannon. This told me the armies were in touch.

Beyond the French lines, were the white-coated infantry, where the Contessa Campogiacinto would be received in all esteem and honor, aye, more,—as a friend and ally, for I had heard she had relations high in the Austrian court.

Within the enemy's lines for her was safety! And I had but—

I stopped myself with a moan. So we rode on, a kind of hell within me.

By nightfall of the next day we had reached a small wayside inn, perhaps ten miles from Castiglione. The booming of cannon was now more distinct. Throughout the day we had journeyed unexcited by the voice of War. Those whom we met claimed victory on the day before for the French.



Desirous as I was of trustworthy information, my heart gave a sudden bound, as riding up to the little hostelry I recognized the form of Tric-trac, standing beside a great brown horse that a bare-legged hostler was watering. The juggler had parted from us on the day after leaving the house of Giacomo, alleging that he had work to do which prevented his longer stay in our company.

Upon my calling to him, he turned and came hastily to Cassius's side with every token of surprise and dissatisfaction in his countenance.

"*Tête-dieu*, but I'm sorry to see you here with the *con-tesa*, Sans-barbe," he began, resting his hand on the withers of my gaunt bay. "*Sacre!* you are pursuing the wrong road, my friend. To the rear, at the best gait you can, and thank the Fates that you ran upon me and received my warning."

"*Peste*, Tric-trac! One would imagine that the Kaiserlicks might come into view at any moment!" I muttered, a hope in my heart that made me shudder.

"Nay, it's not so bad as that," the mountebank replied. "You can rest here to-night with perfect security. Yet be on the road at dawn, and have your horse's noses pointed in the direction whence you came."

"My orders are to join Bonaparte, even if I have to follow him to Vienna."

"And a decidedly good chance he stands of going thither, only 'twill be as a prisoner of war instead of a conqueror."

"A prisoner of war?" I echoed astounded.

"Aye, the dice have run against him at last. Into a very pretty fix our dear little general has got the Army of Italy," Tric-trac observed with a grin of disgust. "Since you're ignorant of what has been done, I'll tell you what the campaign has brought forth for us so far. On the 11th Thermidor, Quasdanowich with twenty thousand Imperialists came down the western shore of Lake Garda and took Salo. On the same day Wurmser himself stormed La Corona and Rivoli on the other side of the lake, wrenching those important positions from Masséna."

"Masséna! never! You are lying," I burst out.

"Don't lose your temper, Sans-barbe, 'tis true! For



all the skill and courage of the Genoese Jew he had to fall back," the mountebank asserted stoutly. "Before the advance of the Austrians both of our wings retired on the 12th. THAT NIGHT BONAPARTE CALLED A COUNCIL-OF-WAR."

I actually bounded in my saddle.

"*Par Dieu!* but you have overdone it!" I cried. "You can't make me believe that the Little Corporal ever did *that!*"

"But he did," Tric-trac retorted, "and what's the result of it? Wurmser has passed the Adige and the Mincio with forty thousand troops. With two divisions of infantry and one of cavalry he has entered Mantua and raised the siege!"

"*Diable!*"

"But that's not the worst of it! Bayalitsch is advancing upon Lonato; Sauret has abandoned Salo; Valette's division relinquished the heights of Castiglione upon the approach of the Austrians under Liptai."

"*Tonnerre de Ciel!*" I muttered.

"You may well say that! Matters look desperate, eh? Still, my boy, I can give you one ray of hope. The spell of that accursed dancer has fallen from him. The Little Corporal has regained his head; he's himself again."

"What has he done?" I asked eagerly.

"Arranged everything to fight it out to-morrow, and with all of his accustomed confidence and spirit, too. Guyeux is to retake Salo; and if it can be done he's the man for the task. With Masséna's division the Commander-in-Chief will try Lonato once more. Augereau will move against Liptai at Castiglione. The 16th Thermidor will be a day of blood, Sans-barbe. But I must not stay longer. I'm off to Cremona—special business from headquarters. Best take my word and turn you horse's head to-morrow."

"And how about your ape?" I asked, for I had no wish to disclose my future actions.

"Agricola has too great a liking for the sound of guns. I've left him shut up in the safety of a stable," replied the juggler, and hurried off, leaving me with an awful temptation in my heart, for *Tric-trac's words told me the Austrian lines were very near.*

The following morning with all despatch we got to



horse, for now I felt my one salvation as a soldier was getting my captive to Bonaparte before her despairing eyes made me a traitor.

Guided by the crash of cannon that roared in augmenting volume upon our ears, with every successive mile we covered, I struggled to the front. All along the horizon the sulphurous smoke-clouds were rising, and we knew that under their suffocating canopies men were dying by scores, while the Republic and the Empire struggled once more for the mastery.

Away to the north on our left the smoke rolled and the cannon growled about the huts of Salo, which Guyeux had taken from the Austrians during the early morning hours, and was now holding in the face of furious efforts made by Quasdanowich to re-occupy the place.

Far to the south the din of close and terrible conflict came from the heights of Castiglione, where the determined Augereau leading his grenadiers in person, on foot with drawn saber amid the hail of bullets, was wrenching, inch by inch, from the grasp of Liptai the ground abandoned by the timid Valette.

Advancing until we gained the head of a column of dragoons that occupied the high road we saw the staggering ranks of our somewhat demoralized and half-beaten infantry that still strove to make head against the steady approach of the long white lines of foemen that were debouching under cover of their flaming guns from the village of Lonato.

On both flanks they overlapped us, ever extending the menacing wall that threatened soon to envelop us completely, despite the energetic resistance of the thin lines of *tirailleurs* with which Bonaparte was attempting to protect his wings.

Above the crackle of musketry, the shriek of shells, and the roar of the sullen artillery, bugle signals and the roll of drums could now be heard from our apparently demoralized center. This indicated that amid the shroud of mingled smoke and dust that hung about them, our infantry were forming close column.

"Cavalry to the front!" shouted an aide-de-camp as he dashed up to the colonel of the dragoon regiment. "The Little Corporal has thrown the 18th and 32d demi-brigades into column of attack and will himself lead



them on to try the Kaiserlick center. You're to support them, colonel, advance your men, for they're moving already."

Even as he spoke the ringing cheers of the infantry came in wild hurrahs across the plain, as sternly and without flinching those sturdy veterans advanced upon the triumphant line of the enemy, now fatally weakened by the too wide extension of its flanks.

As we drew nigh the heart of the combat, the noise seemed to redouble, the crashing volleys of musketry were close and continuous. Yet with butt and bayonet the head of our column won its way, and a frantic yell of "*Toujours la victoire!*" announced that the center of the Austrians was broken.

Dismayed by the separation of their army, the left of Bayalitsch's corps at once began a retrograde movement toward the Mincio, while the right wing retired in the direction of Salo, hoping for a union with Quasdanowich, whose cannon were still heard beyond the town.

A horseman in the dress of the staff, goring with pitiless spurs the flanks of the gallant sorrel that carried him thundered along in front of the supporting dragoons. A bullet had carried away his chapeau. The features of the fiery Junot, called by the soldiers "the Tempest" were recognized by all.

Led by him the regiment fell upon the enemy who were striving to gain Salo, and though Junot himself, charging too impetuously, after killing six of the enemy with his own hand in an attempt to capture Colonel Bender of the Austrian hussars, was cut down and left for dead in a ditch, the retreat of our foemen was turned into a rout, they losing many killed and made prisoners.

But all that day I could not get near the General-in-Chief. Ah! Who could guess at what point our little corporal would be on the field of battle and—the field of glory? For now the shouts of our soldiers and their hot pursuit told that victory had fallen to us.

At the center of our position I learned from a staff officer as he spurred past me, that Bonaparte had gone to join Augereau at Castiglione.

But after a hot ride, when we reached the *quartier-général* at that place, I was again greeted by disap-



pointment. News had arrived that Wurmser was moving in all haste from Mantua to the aid of his lieutenants ; and that Bonaparte had hurriedly ridden to Lonato to hasten the march of Masséna's troops who would concentrate upon those of Augereau.

Once more I turned the footsteps of Cassius towards the north, and, followed by my party, struggled on over a country road now blocked at times by convoys of wounded and of prisoners.

But, though this day had not been hard riding for my tough troopers, I saw that her excitement, and perchance despair, had told upon my captive. Therefore I halted for the night at a little hamlet a few miles before reaching Lonato.

There, during the twilight, in the little lane just outside the village inn my temptation came to me.

All that day the misery in Aliandra's face had put a dagger in my heart. All that day I had noticed that she had grown strangely excited whenever we were near the thunder of the Austrian guns or could see the white-coated soldiers of the German infantry. In curious contrast, whenever it was announced that we were drawing nigh to Bonaparte, Aliandra's eyes had in them a wild look of terror ; she trembled and quivered and seemed to become ashamed.

My temptation came upon me doubly strong because her lips tempted me.

It was soon after dusk that a string of carts loaded with wounded from the front rumbled through the little street and stopped, that water might be given to the parched throats of their occupants.

In this business my men joined, I taking ready hand with them.

While I was handling rope and bucket at the little well in the yard of the inn, my captive stepping from the hostlery, came eagerly towards me.

"Have I your permit to leave my room in the *auberge*, Monsieur Lieutenant?" she asked diffidently."

*Mon Dieu !* how she wounded me.

"Can I not help you succor those poor fellows out there?" she questioned appealingly.

"Yes, and thank your good heart, too, mademoiselle," I muttered, as I gave her a bucket of cool spring water and a tin cup.



With this she tripped gracefully out into the little dusty street, and I stepping after her, for I hated to take my devouring eyes off her beauty, could see *la contessa* give not only refreshments unto my comrades stricken in battle, but woman's tenderness and woman's sympathy. Her kindly voice revived among the war-scarred veterans to whom she ministered, the memories of distant home, and I heard one of them, an old grenadier of the line, whisper, "*Dieu merci*, but your sweet face makes me think, *mademoiselle citoyenne*, of loved eyes that I shall never see again in dear Provence."

Among those Aliandra served, were several Austrian wounded who, in the hurry of field-surgery, had not been separated from our men. As she looked upon these white-coats I could see the girl's eyes become curiously eager, and strangely excited.

Once or twice she passed her white hand over her forehead as if she struggled with resolve.

Then when the little convoy had rumbled on into the darkness she came to me and, placing an appealing hand upon my arm, murmured: "A word with you, Monsieur le Marquis, or perhaps I, your prisoner, should call you Lieutenant Luc!"

Turning to her I gazed upon the suffering beauty of the being I loved.

"You wish to speak to me, *mademoiselle*?" I muttered. I looked about. My troopers were all inside the inn save a sentry posted at either end of the village. No one was near us.

"Your commands, *mademoiselle*!" I asked.

"Not commands, but entreaties! I wish you to release me from my parole."

"Impossible, *mademoiselle*! Your word once given cannot be recalled." Then I murmured entreatingly, "*Mon Dieu*! don't compel me again to put guard or restraint upon you!"

"But you must. For I tell you," she began haughtily, "I shall attempt to fly! The Austrian guns which signify liberty are *too near* to me. If opportunity comes, I shall not be able to restrain myself!" Then she burst out piteously: "Think to what you are taking me! I could bear death, but these whisperings of your brutal soldiers tell of worse to me. They hint me that your



general, though he may spare my life, will perchance not spare what I value more than life ! ”

“ ’Tis, but the rough chatter of the troopers,” I whispered reassuringly. “ The Little Corporal is stern to traitors, but—”

“ But in every town of Italy he has had a maid to bribe him for mercy to her country,” whispered the girl ; then, with determination in her tone she cried : “ But I will not be one of these ! I am here to tell you I will try to escape. For your own safety put guard upon me, that when you reach your general he may not punish you for not having done your duty ! ”

“ Still I will not accept your parole.”

Her haughty eyes had the light of intense resolve within them ; though her face, even as she spoke of what was before her, had blushed in the moonlight till it was red as fire. But now as she continued she grew pale again.

“ Impossible ! ” she whispered, then broke out at me, a kind of jeering despair, mingled with the music of her voice : “ And this is the man who once said he loved me ! This man who will take me like a lamb to the slaughter—perhaps even to shame ! If your General spares me the executioner, they say he will not spare me outrage ! ” she faltered, a kind of terror in her voice, next whispered, “ I beg you, *monsieur*, let me try to escape in some position where your troopers can surely shoot me down, let me die in the road ! Don’t take me to Bonaparte ! *Madonna mia*, give me the doom even of the noose ! Let me die like the others that you slew in the mountains, but not—not—not the mercy of Bonaparte ! ”

Her shudders, her despair, her appeal to my love made me, as I looked at her, even more desperate than she.

I whispered : “ You think within the Austrian lines there is safety for you ? ”

“ Yes ! within those lines safety, joy, happiness, *innocence* ! ”

“ Then to-morrow morning,” I glanced hurriedly around, for I was trembling. There was no chance of an ear upon my words, but I spoke so low my breath scarce fanned her pretty ear. “ To-morrow morning *you shall be within the Austrian lines* ! ”



“*You mean it ?*”

“By my soul and by my love !”

“And your reward ?” Aliandra whispered. She was trembling now.

“Whatever gratitude, when safe within the Austrian lines, an Italian *contessa* may give to a poor soldier of France who, for her love, has made himself a traitor, and dishonored his uniform ; to man prescribed and accursed !”

“You—you mean that also ?”

“By the faith of the Marquis de St. Luc ! Look on my face and see !”

She looked ! She believed !

“The Virgin bless you !” she murmured. Then suddenly two superbly rounded arms, the muscles swelling under their ivory skin, came around my neck, two rosebud lips, dewy with ardent love, kissed mine, and I, the accursed of man, the traitor to the tricolor, was, for one moment—*happy !*

The next she had flitted from me and vanished within the shadows of the inn.

I glanced up and down the street. No one had seen the interview ; my sentries were both patrolling at the farther ends of the little lane, but still the terror of the deserter was upon me.

From out the inn door strolled Poigent d’Acier.

As he sucked his pipe he jeered : “This philandering with a *contessa* is too much for thy nerves, Monsieur le Marquis. *Nom de Dieu !* Lieutenant Sans-barbe, you have a face like that of a grenadier who I saw *strike his colonel !*”

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE GIFT OF BONAPARTE.

WHEN a soldier has mutiny in his mind, the devil generally finds him quick opportunity.

Mine came to me soon enough.

Within the hour another string of carts filled with wounded, traveling at night because it was cooler, rumbled through the streets of the village and made a short halt to permit refreshment.



I assisted my men in drawing cool water from the well and carrying it out to the sufferers. While doing this, I noticed the last few wagons were full of Austrian wounded, made prisoners that day. Recognizing these by their uniforms, which gleamed white in the moonlight; as I gave water to our enemies, I thought I might obtain information of the location of the Austrian forces from some one of them.

The soldiers of the Emperor had received an awful defeat; doubtless they would soon retreat. Before they were out of reach I must contrive to get the *con-  
tessa* safe within their lines.

Many of the Kaiserlicks were too far gone to do more than quaff greedily the refreshing fluid, but one, a sergeant of Tyrolean yaggers, but slightly wounded in the leg, seemed much more talkative.

"You were captured to-day?" I remarked to him.

"Yes, but four hours ago, as we retreated from Salo towards Brescia.

"Yes, you were pretty nearly exterminated. But *sacre*, it is always so, when our Little Corporal commands in person," I suggested triumphantly. Even in my treachery I gloried in our victory.

"*Der Teufel!* Our brigade was not broken up. You have not yet done with us!" the man said angrily.

"Bah!" I replied, anxious to lead him into discussion. "What do you think a few thousand of you will do now that you are defeated and cut off? To-morrow you will surrender!"

"Never!" snarled the Tyrolean sergeant; then laughed grimly, "To-morrow they will cut their way through to Mantua and join Wurmser; or I don't know the general who commanded us to-day." This was uttered confidently, almost defiantly.

"Your brigade is then located near Brescia?" I said carelessly.

"Near enough for it to take the road to Mantua!" growled the sergeant, as I handed him another can of water. "Thanks for your courtesy, Herr Lieutenant!" Then he closed his mouth, thinking perhaps he had said too much already; for though I plied him with a few more questions I got no answer from him except: "You French will see!"

But this was information enough for me. From the



neighborhood of Brescia the Austrians must pass along the road towards Lonato.

Five minutes after, I knocked at the chamber of Aliandra.

"Who is there? What do you want?" the girl spoke through the portal.

"It is I, Lieutenant Luc!" Open your door a little that I may give you your orders for to-morrow!" I cried brusquely. Some of the men might be in hearing.

This she did and I whispered, "Be ready to take horse at four o'clock to-morrow morning? You understand?"

"Yes!" replied my captive softly. "Thank you! *Monsieur le Marquis.*" Then she suddenly extended a white hand through the opening. Upon its fingers I placed my lips tenderly, devotedly.

Going from her, the night seemed as black to me as my treachery, as I thought my project well out. Early in the morning I determined, using my authority as officer, I would take Aliandra with me in advance of my troopers. Then contriving to fall in with the march of the Austrians, by them, I would be captured with my prisoner.

No blame would fall on me, it would only be the fortune of war!

But the next morning I found Poignet d'Acier and Santron had made this plan impossible.

I did not sleep and at four o'clock, stood at the door of the auberge awaiting her. But there I found the *maître d'armes* and the sergeant who had all my troopers up cleaning their horses; they are anxious to get to headquarters and join their regiment.

"*Parbleu!*" remarked the gruff Santron. To-day we will get this nasty job finished and our rebel jailed. 'Twas hard all yesterday to ride upon the outskirts of a battle and not fire one shot or strike one blow for promotion and the Republic!"

"You, I see, my lieutenant, are up early and equally eager!" added Poignet d'Acier, a curious tremble in his voice. "So likewise our prisoner!" and he turned grimly towards the fair girl, who, in her riding-habit, was standing in the doorway of the inn, ready for her ride to the Austrian lines.

It was evident now that I could not leave my troop-



ers without explanation, and I had no logical one for avoiding their escort. Had they been tardy or unprepared I might have jogged out of the village in advance of them.

"There is no great hurry, Santron!" I remarked casually. "See that the men have breakfast before we start!" and stepping into the inn ordered refreshment for myself and Aliandra. At this meal, her glorious eyes gave me an impatient and inquiring glance, yet one of such heart-breaking entreaty, and yet perchance such *promise*, that I came out doubly a traitor, and looking at my men as they were saddling up, muttered to myself: "*Par Dieu!* They will have it!"

For now I felt that my troopers must be captured as well as I. Then the devil coming into my heart, said: "This will not even make you a suspect; you will simply have suffered the fate that may come to any brave soldier surrounded and overpowered."

With that my eyes grew misty. *Diable!* would not my troopers make resistance? Would they be not cut down fighting because I had led them to the Austrian bayonets? Poignet d'Acier would not be likely to surrender very quickly, neither would any of the rest. And I, their officer—

But the thought drove me crazy.

Turning away with gloomy face from them, I saw her beauty and her *innocence!* Could I give her up to military punishment? Could I place my darling a prey to the passions of a military despot? For that was what I, lashed by my fears, now called the general I had once adored.

One look at her gave me resolve; for Aliandra had in her now what she had gradually lost, as we approached the commander-in-chief—*hope!*

Her eyes were brilliant with nervous anxiety, her mouth piquantly pleading, her lips trembling yet dewy and rosy, her beauty would have made any man her slave yet her adorer.

Getting on our way some little time after six o'clock, we rode briskly towards the north, I guessing if the Tyrolean yagger's words were true, that on the road to Lonato I would meet the Austrian infantry.

We rode quite fast; I had become desperate to get my crime consummated and my torture at an end,



besides, every time the graceful creature riding at my side turned her glance upon me it asked "WHEN?"

Some hours after this from a moderate rise in our path, I saw a half mile beyond us the Lonato road dusty and hot under the burning sun, but upon it no trace of white-coated Austrians.

"Halt the platoon, Santron!" I cried. "Take good charge of our prisoner. I will ride to that hill just in advance of us and reconnoiter to see that all is safe."

"The Kaiserlicks are beaten and have retreated!" muttered the sergeant doggedly.

"But there may be broken and wandering fragments of them wandering about the country," I replied. "Besides, these are my orders."

Then the men halted. I saw Poignet d'Acier give a curious look at Santron, as I put spurs to Cassius and galloped up the sharp rise to the top of a neighboring hill.

From this eminence I had a fair view of the landscape. In front of me, rolling land some four or five hundred yards to the Lonato road; beyond it rugged country made green by clumps of trees with just a glimpse of the lake Di Garda, now blue as steel under the Italian sun.

But it was to the *left* that I glanced anxiously.

Along the road coming from Brescia were no signs of marching Austrians. The information of the Tyrolean was not true. "I shall not save Aliandra!" I muttered, and my heart grew heavy and my eyes haggard.

Then suddenly I gave a little cry! From the neighboring hills that cut off my view, a cloud of dust was flying! A column of white-coated Austrian infantry was marching down. Within ten minutes my love would be safe from military vengeance and I forever accursed and a traitor!

Casting my eyes towards my *right*, to see that there was naught to interfere with my awful plan, my glance came upon the white walls of the town of Lonato, scarce half a mile along the road.

In it apparently a few French troops, so few that they would be swept away at the first charge of the heavy Austrian column.

Still there *must* be more of our men, I reflected, for I distinctly saw a picket of the *Guides*, the general-in-



chief's bodyguard, standing beside their horses at the entrance of the principal street.

*Diable !* He is there ! Bonaparte ! To whom I am to lead my captive to receive her punishment ! To the *left* is her safety ; to the *right* is her despair.

But still as I looked with shaded eyes, though I could see the general headquarters flag flying in the town of Lonato, there was scarce a battalion of French, and beyond it—*Nom de Dieu !* more white-coated infantry were coming in solid column from the east.

In a moment I understood ! Before my eyes flashed the military situation.

The French, everywhere victorious, had everywhere pushed on in pursuit of the beaten Austrians, and now, by the strange chance of war, two flying portions of the beaten army were converging from both sides upon the headquarters of their conqueror, the man who held Italy, nay, the destiny of France, my country, within his care. The half-regiment would be a flea-bite to two brigades of Austrians. Bonaparte would be captured. With a groan I thought : What will the army do without Le Petit Corporal, who leads them always to victory ? What will France do *without him* ? For if these Kaiserlicks capture Bonaparte, they will never give him up !

Then the mist cleared from my eyes !

I forgot my love ; I became only a soldier of France who *must save his general* !

I waved my hand, ordering my troops to come on, and galloped down the hill to meet them.

As they clattered up the road I joined them, crying, in a hoarse voice : “Quick ! Save him ! Follow me !”

“What do you mean ?” shouted d’Acier.

“Follow me and *save Bonaparte* ! He is unconscious of his danger ! The Austrians are on both sides of the town ! A demi-regiment only within it and Bonaparte *there* ! Quick !” and I drove the rowels into Cassius’ sides.

In almost an instant I was in the Lanato road. With a hoarse shriek and muttered curses my troopers were behind me.

As we entered the highway two troops of Austrian cavalry came charging down upon us.



“Don’t fight now! First warn the Emperor!” I cried to Santron, who doggedly would have crossed sabers with them.

Then, suddenly discovering I was perjured, the *con-  
tessa*, with a little cry, had desperately turned her horse to gallop towards the Austrians. But the sergeant’s firm hand was on her wrist, and she rode with us a prisoner still.

Look at her face I dared not, yet I knew it said, “Thou lied to me when you said you loved me!”

But I was a soldier now, *true* soldier, thank God, to my country, to the Republic, to my general! and I dashed the rowels in my steed.

“Dost know, my lieutenant,” muttered Poignet d’Acier, spurring beside me, “that Santron and I thought her witchery had made you traitor? We were watching you. Had you led us into the Austrian lines, my sword had come out between thy shoulders. Forgive me, my Georges, for doubting that you were true to thy oath and to thy colors!” and the old *maître d’armes* embraced me as we rode on desperately together.

So we came foaming up to the houses of Lonato. The Austrian squadron halted, and an officer, a single horseman, galloped from them at full speed, following us to the outpost.

Recklessly and boldly he rode, scarce deigning to wave once or twice a white handkerchief he carried in his hand.

Even as we reached the troopers of the *Guides*, the Austrian cried to me, “I bear a summons to surrender! We are in such force you cannot resist!”

I glanced back. Beyond him from the hills above the town a brigade of white-coated infantry was pouring down and deploying on the plain—to the East more white coats marching in solid column!

“Detain this officer here! Let no one speak to him! See that all remain silent in his presence! Moreover, bandage his eyes!” I whispered to the sergeant in command of the outpost, a sturdy not over-intelligent appearing *sabreur*. “Not a word!” as the sergeant seemed about to utter a protest. “You have my orders, obey them or you’ll pay for it. My



men remain here with the picket. Guard the *contessa*, Poinet d'Acier as you would your life."

Cassius bounded along the street of Lonato, and presently I flung myself out of the saddle before an inn where a score of saddle-horses held by orderlies denoted the presence of the staff.

*Ciel!* not a dawdling *aide-de-camp* guessed the strait they all were in!

"General Bonaparte?" I demanded of the officer in charge of the guard at the door.

"You can't enter now," he returned. "The whole of them are occupied and—"

"*Dame!* I must see him, man, and at once. Take me to him this moment. It concerns the safety of the army."

Impressed by my earnest tone he offered no further opposition, but piloted me at once into the presence of the Commander-in-Chief who was at that moment entirely alone, not even Berthier being in the room with him.

Bonaparte's eagle glance fixed me as I came forward. Even as I saluted he spoke my name.

"Ha! Lieutenant Luc at last," he said coldly. "You have at length put in your tardy appearance, days after the return of all the other detachments employed in the mountains. You must have done your work there most thoroughly to judge by the time you have taken to perform it."

"You shall hear my report and decide upon what I have accomplished presently, Citizen General," I answered. "Before I tell you"—

Impatiently he interrupted me.

"*Presently! Sacre!* but I like that! You intend to take your own time for explaining, do you? *Presently!* And why not at once?"

"Because more important matters I have to relate *first*," I said rapidly. "*Mon général*, a body of Austrian infantry, several thousands, are surrounding the town. An officer sent by their commander is already at the picket-guard without the village bearing a summons for surrender. I ordered them to delay him there and rode here at once to tell you."

*Dame!* but the man was a human iceberg—*when he wished*. He heard my alarming tidings without a



change of countenance. One keen flash of his cold eyes he cast upon mine, and whatever else he read in my face he must have found truth there.

Calmly he rose from his chair, put both hands behind his back and with slightly bowed head he paced the length of the room.

Returning he stopped in front of me, and piercing me through and through with those unreadable orbs of steely gray, he demanded abruptly :

"You halted the Austrian envoy at the entrance to the town, you say? Why?"

"They can't know that *you* are here in person, Citizen General. If you form the staff before the inn, draw up what escort you have to make a show, and then have the Kaiserlick brought before you, he'll be dumfounded when he learns that he's come to propose surrender to Bonaparte. He'll imagine that he has the whole army to contend with! You can threaten them with death if they don't yield. And *par Dieu!* they'll be the ones to lay down their arms."

As I finished, Bonaparte smiled, one of those rare and kindly smiles that from him marked an era in the life of the soldier upon whom it was bestowed. Reaching out his hand he seized my left ear between his forefinger and thumb, wringing it sharply as he said with a chuckle :

"You rogue! you young devil of a *chasseur!* *how did you read my thoughts?*"

"Your thoughts, *mon général?*" I stammered.

"Yes! For I had determined to do just what you suggest."

Striding out with me, he gave his orders sharply and promptly.

"Totally deceived by the imposing appearance of a brilliant staff and awed by the simulated anger of Bonaparte, the Austrian officer returned to his commander with the tidings that the general-in-chief of the French threatened to put to the sword their entire body unless they surrendered at once.

In consequence, four thousand men of that division of the Imperial troops which had been driven upon Salo on the previous day became captive to one quarter as many opponents.

The surrender of the Austrians having been secured.



The general ordered me to follow him once more into his temporary quarters.

Seating himself he began immediately : " And now, Lieutenant Luc, for your report. I trust you can tell me of success, for only the greatest will excuse your long absence. *En avant*, proceed with your story."

" I have the honor to report that the Count Luca di Campogiacinto is no more, that the members of his band have been executed without exception," I answered.

" The details ? " he demanded.

Accurately I recounted the events of my expedition.

When I had ceased speaking he demanded savagely, " The girl ? Where is she ? "

" Without ! Under charge of my *chasseurs*, *mon general* ! " I replied, with an effort.

" Bring her in. "

A minute after I stood before Aliandra. I could not speak to her ; there was a choking lump in my throat. I looked in her face and saw I had saved France, but lost *her*.

Obeying my sign she followed me into the presence of the arbiter of her destiny—of mine also.

Even as we entered, a short harsh exclamation from Bonaparte told his surprise at the beauty of the lovely creature that had been brought to him for punishment.

He drew a quick sharp breath and the expression of his face as he continued to stare at Aliandra, made me regret that I had saved him.

Well might he gaze, for never had he before him a fairer and a haughtier culprit. There was no shrinking in her glance, no more trembling in her pose, now !

Fronting the man who held her fate at his will, she stood like a Juno, the clinging cloth of her habit outlining a bust as perfect as that of the Medicean Venus. The gathered folds of her riding skirt fell away from a waist so slight that even my hands might span, to outline limbs of beauty incomparable, from swelling hips to little feet, one of which in dainty riding boot, peeped out from its dark draperies.

But the face above, this figure—the glorious eyes, the lips of red, the blushing cheeks—For face to face with her chastisement—the girl seemed strangely brave.



Then I grew pale myself, for I could see this beauty was affecting Napoleon also.

| He drew a quick, short breath, and the expression of his face as he continued to stare at Aliandra made my hand itch to grasp my sabre.

When finally he spoke his voice was harsh and without pity.

"I am rejoiced to see you here, *mademoiselle*," he said, "extremely rejoiced. You have aided in the playing of some sad pranks yonder in Piedmont, you were concerned in the rising of those foolish peasants whom I was forced to punish so heavily at Pavia. The penalty paid by the masses should not be remitted their leaders. I have information that you were active among these last. The case scarcely admits dispute; yet if you have anything to say in mitigation of your crime, I will hear you."

"I have no wish to deny your accusations, General Bonaparte," Aliandra replied without hesitation, still regarding him with calm and unfrightened eyes. "I *did* urge the people to attack your army. By every means in my power I have done you harm. I am here to pay the penalty."

"*Sacre bleu!* she has courage, this girl," the general muttered under his breath. "Do you understand, *mademoiselle*," raising his voice, "that by your own words you condemn yourself to death?"

"Yes, I know," she answered undaunted. "What other fate can an Italian patriot expect from *you*?"

The greatness of her beauty as she spoke was magnified by her unconquerable courage. I set my teeth hard, The desire to stretch her inquisitor dead at her feet was tearing my heart asunder. If he kept us there much longer I felt that I would again forget he was my general.

Bonaparte paced the room after hearing her resolute reply. For fully two minutes he meditated. Halting at last before her, he exclaimed, not attempting to veil the admiration he experienced.

"*Par Dieu!* I cannot do it! To give the order to execute so beautiful a being would be a crime! A spirit such as yours should not be extinguished! Yet, *mademoiselle*, you must be punished. What shall I do with you?"



His glance more than his words suggested the idea her beauty had placed within his mind.

A flash of her great eyes told Aliandra's scorn of the amorous regard of Bonaparte.

Laughing curtly as he noted her disdain, the Commander-in-Chief turned to me,

"Surely we should be able to make this lovely rebel love France, Lieutenant Luc? What punishment do you suggest? What shall *I* do with *her*?"

I looked straight into his eyes, that were seeking a devil's hint from mine. Then a rude hope—an inspiration flashed through my pate. Bluntly I blurted out: "*Mon général* you have so many! *give this one to me!*"

I heard the *contessa* utter a little gasping exclamation as a roar of laughter from Bonaparte filled the room.

"By the tricolor! you'll never fail in this world for want of assurance my *chasseur captain*," he cried, when he could command his voice. "Yes, I give you the grade, your success against the Barbets has won it, you've an eye for beauty as well as for carte and tierce, as I know of old. La Favorita, eh, Monsieur Beardless, *roue*? you haven't forgotten her, I'll wager, nor indeed has she—*sacre!*" and biting his lips he regarded me for some seconds with the glare of a tiger.

"See here, my new-made captain," he presently said in his softest tone, "suppose I grant your audacious request and give you this girl here to treat as you will. Suppose I turn her over to you without reservation, make her your spoil of war. In that case will you lay aside all thoughts of the other, of the queen of the *ballerinas*?"

"I'll give my word never to approach La Favorita again, Citizen General," I said earnestly.

"Then in the name of the Devil, take this one and welcome!" he exclaimed with laughing satisfaction.

"You belong to *him* now, *mademoiselle*," he went on to Aliandra, who was staring at us both in turn, with disbelief and astonishment in her eyes. "*He* is your punishment, Captain San-barbe shall teach you what it costs to rise in mutiny against France."

The *contessa* gave me one look of unutterable horror, the blood rushed over her white neck and dyed her soft



cheeks a vivid crimson. Covering her face with her hands, she shrank back to the wall, a moan of anguish escaping her lips.

I had won from *him*, now was the time to *win* from *her*!

"*Mon général*, you have my heartfelt gratitude," I said in tones she could not fail to comprehend. "You permit me, then, to make this lady my wife?"

"*Your wife?*"

The same words, enunciated by two separate voices, rang through the room. The tone of Bonaparte astonished, ironical; the voice of Aliandra agitated by every passion woman feels.

"Yes, my wife!" I returned fiercely and decidedly. "General Bonaparte, I have loved this lady ever since I first saw her. You have given her to me, but that alters in no degree the respect and worship I bear her in my heart. If she will marry me, she will make me the happiest soldier upon the earth. If she refuses to be my wife, le Marquis de St. Luc will continue to adore her!"

"*Le Marquis de St. Luc!*" Bonaparte laughed. "Why, but a month ago it was Lieutenant *Sans-culotte!* Who told you of your ancestors, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"The same *maître d'armes* who told you of them on the night before Montenotte, *citizen général!*" I returned. "And proved it to me also, as I can prove it to you or to her, that of right I am Marquis de St. Luc!"

For a second silence reigned. Then Bonaparte spoke half jeeringly, "Knowing what you do, captain, it can scarcely be possible that you hold the same extreme sentiments you avowed to me at our first meeting. Of what political party do you belong?"

Here, inspiration coming to me again, I whispered in his ear, "Of *your* party, *mon général!* Some day you will rule France! When the time comes for your *coup*, remember the sword of Georges de St. Luc is at your service. From now on I declare myself a Bonapartist!"

Bonaparte's eyes flamed as he gazed into mine. The look of the future came upon him. I believe he saw Jena and Austerlitz—but scarcely Waterloo.

"*Diable*, you are a politician!" he said slowly,



next whispered, his eyes growing cold as fate: "Forget this, till I remind you of it. Now," he added briskly, "as to her."

"As to her," I cried, "I demand that this lady be treated with all the honor of my affianced bride!"

At these words a tenderer look seemed to come into the eyes of Aliandra.

"*Sapristi*, Marquis!" jeered the general. "You are also a financier! I had forgotten that the estates of your family have been confiscated. Mademoiselle la Contessa de Campogiacinto is the greatest heiress in all northern Italy. You are an astute lad."

"Not for the estates do I woo her, but for the woman!"

"Pish!" he remarked; then turned his eyes sharply on the loveliness of Aliandra, who still regarded me like a snared bird in the fowler's hand, and could not doubt my word.

"What say you, girl?" continued Napoleon sharply, "Wilt take for thy husband this hard-riding captain of *chasseurs*, or rather, I should say, Monsieur le Marquis de St. St. Luc?"

"No!" the answer rang out proudly, disdainfully.

"Thou dost not love him?" he grinned, looking in her blushing face, which now grew deathly pale as Aliandra answered with freezing coldness: "I am indifferent to Monsieur, le Marquis de St. Luc!"

"What!" I broke out "after last night, when—" Fortunately I checked myself in time, or I had let the largest kind of a cat out of the bag.

"Last night," began the girl passionately, "I thought you worthy of my love. Now, from the words of your own general, *I doubt it!*"

"*Mon Dieu, Aliandra!* How can you say this when I adore you?" I cried.

"Then first a question to you, *monsieur.*" The girl's eyes were very haughty now, though there was a trembling whimper in her voice. "Some months ago you told me that you loved me?"

"With my soul!"

"Again, when that night in the priest's house—to save your life—I did that which might condemn me before the world, you told me that your love for me should ever be your guiding star!"



"I said it from my heart!"

"Since then how have you kept your word?"

At this awful question there was a low chuckle from Bonaparte; as she went on passionately: "This dancer, La Favorita, who they say allures all men even to general officers who have *distant* brides!"

Despite myself I grinned as I saw Napoleon wince.

But the girl continued sternly, "Since swearing that you loved me, hast thou been false to thy vows to me with her? Answer before thy God!"

"No!" I cried desperately yet savagely. At my words, I heard Bonaparte chuckle to himself: "*Parbleu!*" I interrupted that *petit souper* in the nick of time."

"Thank the Virgin!" whispered the girl, a new light coming into her eyes. Then standing very erect she said haughtily, "I am the last of my line. Prove you are worthy to be a prince in Italy!"

"How?" I muttered, astounded yet very joyful.

"I'll show him *how!*" cried Bonaparte, breaking in. "I'll show him how to prove he is worthy to be an officer of France!"

Then perchance into his heart coming that passion for giving in marriage he afterward exercised so freely when as Emperor he decreed brides, willing or unwilling, to half the kings of Europe, he continued sternly: "You, my proud minx, who have dared to refuse a man to whom I have given you, shall become a nun or be his bride. Into a convent of Carmelites you shall go. They will be eager for you. These monks and friars will be ravenous to annex your property to the Church. The nun's veil or thou shalt wed him when he becomes a colonel!"

"A colonel in a single campaign!" I cried despairingly.

"Single campaign!"

"Yes You, *mon général*, will surely conquer Italy in *one!*"

"Peste! I was once a captain," remarked Bonaparte complacently, "and now at twenty-six I am a General-in-chief!"

"But I am *not* Napoleon!" I muttered hopelessly.

*Ciel!* how he chuckled at my unwitting compliment. 'Tis a safe game to flatter all *great* men—they know you



are telling the truth. Seeing my lucky hit I quietly suggested: "As *chef d'escadron* for delivering two Austrian brigades this very morning?"

For a moment the autocrat stared at my audacity, then cried:

"*Par Dieu!* it was worth it! *Chef d'escadron* thou art! Girl, listen! I am promoting thy lover! Thy wedding day is growing nearer!"

Then remembering Poignet d'Aciers fencing maxim, "Follow one good stroke by another," I remarked: "Her wedding day is *to-day!*"

"To-day! I said when thou weren't a colonel!"

"As the Lady Aliandra, if wedded to a colonel on your staff would destroy all danger of insurrection in the mountains, with her as my bride you could remove four demi-brigades, garrisoning the passages of the Apenines. Reinforcements might be useful to you after the slaughter of yesterday?"

Here suddenly Bonaparte turned to the lady of my love whose eyes had sought the floor, whose cheeks were covered with blushes, of bashfulness, of happiness, I prayed, and asked: "How say you, Contessa di Campocinto? If thou wert wedded to a French colonel, would thy peasantry become my allies?"

"They love me much, sir!" faltered the girl.

"By all the Gods! She is in a *hurry* to marry you, Sans-barbe!" chuckled Bonaparte, slapping me on the shoulder.

Then summoning an officer to him, he ordered: "A priest within ten minutes!"

"Ten minutes!" screamed Aliandra. Then blushing like an Alpine rosebud, she faltered, "But he is *not* a colonel!"

"*Diable*, but he is; a colonel on my staff," cried the general angrily. "Don't contradict me, *mademoiselle*. If you can be in a hurry, so can I. Quick, a priest! Any kind will do!"

"A priest!" faltered my sweetheart; then muttered, "Georges!" as I caught her, for she had fainted in my arms.

"Summon all my staff!" ordered Bonaparte, rubbing his hands, "and bring in Sans-barbe's troop to see what valor, a long head and the assurance of Lucifer will do for a soldier."



Two moments after he bounced from his chair, and stammered.

"Sapristi! What have we here? A monkey!" As Agricola, and Tric-Trac, and Poignet d'Acier, Red Santron and half a dozen others of my platoon came rather diffidently in. To them he chuckled, "I can't give you promotion, but here is gold. All of you drink Colonel Sans-Barbe's health!" then cried: "*Dieu merci!* The friar at last!" for Bonaparte was always a devil of a fellow to make quick matches either for himself or others.

A moment later I was introduced as Colonel Luc to his brilliant stagg, their general stating my rank had been given me for military reasons, I having given unto his hands that day four thousand Austrians.

"This should be a hint to you, Berthier, to keep better guard over your chief," laughed Bonaparte.

Then in a kind of haze I saw Aliandra become my bride.

But even as the priest mumbled the last words over us that made her mine, an officer, breathless, sweaty and dusty came flying in.

Saluting, he cried: "General Wurmser is in full advance from Mantua on the Castiglione road!"

"That's where I want him!" answered Bonaparte sharply. "No time to drink even the bride's health or give her wedding gifts, but, Sans-barbe, when you take your bride in your arms to-night, say she is the *gift of Bonaparte!*"

His escort were mounting their horses. I sprang up to follow him, but he stopped me and said, "A week's leave of absence! Without your saber I destroyed Wurmser's right wing yesterday! Don't you think I can defeat his left wing to-day by myself, my new made Colonel?"

Then seizing Aliandra even as she rose from her knees before the priest, he gave her two sounding kisses on the lips and laughed, "Make me a godfather, quickly!"

A moment later he rode away to the last battles of of that incomparable campaign in which he drove the last of Wurmser's army through the passes of the Tyrol and gave Italy to France. **615**























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